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THE WATERS OF CANEY FORK

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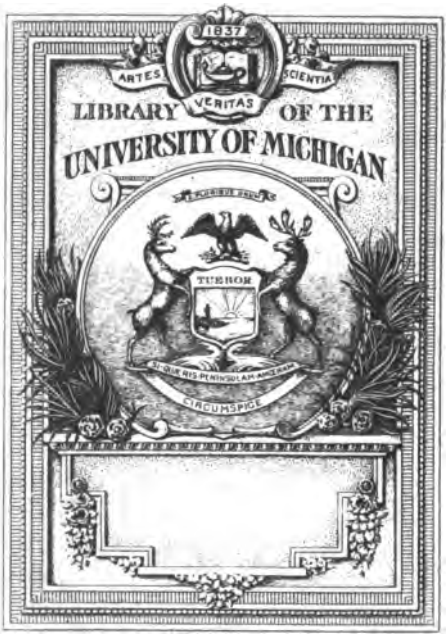

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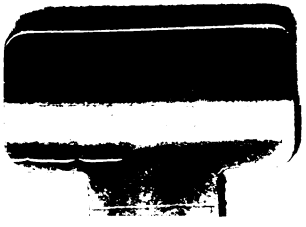

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THE WATERS OF CANEY FORK.

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THE WATERS OF CANEY FORK

A Romance of Tennessee

BY

OPIE READ,

AUTHOR OF

"AN ARKANSAS PLANTER," "UP TERRAPIN RIVER," ETC.

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THE WATERS OF CANEY FORK.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY IMPIETY.

In my early fancy there lay a place where the sun was always shining. The first impression made upon my memory was a flood of light on a lawn, and in after years this light, undimmed by time, seemed to lie there. It was in a hilly district of Northern Tennessee, not far from the Kentucky line. My father, a country physician, had begun life there; but in my early infancy he moved to the town of Gallatin, not more than sixteen miles distant, but indeed a complete change of life for a doctor whose practice had been confined to the ills of a rude and rustic population. To me the change must have been world-wide. I can recall a part of the great journey, a wagon stuck in the mire, a lank man, clad in brown, coughing as he stood to watch our perplexity; a boy riding a stick-horse, a girl swinging on a gate. The air was clear and the sun was shining, but I could not get it out of my mind that we were moving away from the brightest spot in the world—the lawn in front of our old house. I do not remember when we

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arrived at the town. A mist seemed to settle about me, with now and then a glimmering of light, like a fire-fly, and then came the glow of lamps in a street. A black nurse held me by the hand, and we were standing on the steps in front of a house. I saw a man in the street, walking slowly, bending over. My father came out upon the steps, and I asked him what the man was doing, and he told me that Hugh Calfrey had killed John Taylor, and that the man was sprinkling sand on the blood.

My father seemed at that moment to stir to life a new consciousness, and thenceforth I began to live more consecutively—less with mere glimpses, and more with a steady gaze. In the light, the reason, the education and the broad-mindedness of to-day, how unsympathetic with the principles of an Anglo-Saxon republic was the atmosphere in which I existed. The institution of slavery was at the height of arrogant power. Society had begun to murmur a complaint against what it termed the loose freedom of the ballot-box, and a well-known jurist had declared that a man who did not enroll in his list of property as many as five negroes should not be suffered to cast his vote at an important election. And yet society was fervently religious. A country gentleman who lived near Gallatin sold a blacksmith for twenty-five hundred dollars, and with the proceeds of the sale he generously bought a bell for a new church. His liberality was the talk of the community. I remember hearing the bell when first it was rung in the tower, and the giver was pointed out to me by my "black mammy" as he strode along

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the street, a pack of hounds at his heels. To a casuist this must have been an abominable state of affairs, but to us it was natural. Nor was it wanting in romance or poetic color. In every household the well-appearing stranger found a hospitality, a refined freedom and a cheer that was not offered in communities which held slavery in abhorrence. The hospitality might have been found wherever there was wealth, but the refinement and the good-cheer grew up from the seeds carelessly scattered by leisure.

My grandfather had come from North Carolina with his slaves and his cattle, and in hunting about for wild pea vines on which his stock might feed, had, in his eagerness, run over a strip of country which is now a part of the famous blue-grass region, and had settled in the hill district where the land was not so fertile, but where the cattle were offered a pea-vine range. The old gentleman, I have been told, was God-fearing enough to attach himself to a church, and no one could pick a flaw in his devotion on Sunday, but on Monday he had been known to swear at his stupidity for having crossed the land of Canaan to settle in a place where there was but little honey and where the milk tasted of wild pease. He must have been a character. He was not always sober. Once he clamored to return to North Carolina to visit his relatives. My father and my uncle, so the story goes, fitted him out with a carriage, two fine horses and a negro driver. He drove off one morning charged with letters and many a message for loved ones in the old North State. Time passed and the sons began to wonder at his long absence. One

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evening he drove up to the gate in an old carry-all, drawn by a woolly mule. At a glance the boys saw that he had been on a spree and that he had not reached North Carolina; that he had sold his outfit and poured the proceeds into the mäelstrom of his appetite. But they said nothing in reproach. They helped him out of his rattle-trap. He was stiff with cold. They unharnessed the old mule and he staggered as he was led away. It was supper time and the old man sat down to the table without saying a word. After supper he took down his pipe and sat by the fire, smoking in silence. When bed-time came he got up and wound the clock. He had been afraid that his sons would reproach him, and he had winced at every sound. He deserved censure. He had spent their earnings for a year. His own silence began to eat at him. His old wife sat in a corner, knitting, afraid to look up lest he might see her tears. After a long time the old man turned to my father.

"Mitford," he said, "did you feed that mule?"

"I put feed in the trough, but he wouldn't eat. I don't think he'll live till morning."

"Don't say that," the old fellow whimpered. "Don't tell me that he is going to die, for he's the only friend I've got in the world."

The old woman got up with a protesting cry and put her arms about him, the boys seized him with affection, and they all wept together. In the morning the old mule was found dead in the stall.

"Drag him off," said the old man. "I reckon he was as little account as any mule that ever lived.

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Drag him off down yonder in the hollow and we'll all begin life over again."

My father's Christian name was given to me (I was an only child), and it was early settled that I should follow his profession; and I demanded of my negro boy Nick that in the presence of strangers he was not to address me as "'Marse'' Mitford, but as Dr. Hudley. Nick was older and stronger than I; he was intensely black with blue gums, and his mother, who was my "black mammy," deplored her offspring. She declared that a blue-gummed negro was born to be either hanged or to see ghosts, and it developed that the ghost was to be Nick's specialty. He sometimes kept me in a state of terror. Whenever he wanted anything that I possessed, a top or a marble, he would threaten me with his ghost, and swore that if I told anyone the "hants" would get me sure. Once he ordered me to fight a boy nearly twice my weight, and I came off victor, a conqueror inspired by fear. As time passed my piece of black property grew bolder. He would steal and if accused would frighten me into an acknowledgment of the theft. My mother took me into her room one night and wept over me. My father had stormed at me and had almost broken my heart by swearing his regret that I had ever been born. In my mother's arms I confessed, and I clung to her, imploring her to protect me. My father was summoned and the truth was explained to him. He took me in his arms and fondly kissed me. He told me that there were no ghosts—he talked to me in his convincing way till I would have dared to go down

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in the cellar alone; till, indeed, I should have been glad to meet a "spook" face to face, in order to prove that I was worthy of my name. I begged my father not to whip Nick. He did not, but shortly afterward the rascal was sent to my uncle's plantation in Mississippi. His mother parted from him with but little concern, although she must have known that it was not intended for her to see him again. And indeed she did not, for a year or so later we received news that he had been shot and killed while attempting to commit a robbery.

In our town religious discussion was at a fever heat. A stranger might have supposed that the work of Christian conversion had just been introduced. Everybody was reading Bunyan's book. It was such a sensation that it might have just issued from the press. While listening to the reading of this book I was struck with the idea that the only way to be good was first to be bad. Children were taught to believe that their souls were in danger. There were no ghosts, but there was a hell. Bunyan was my model of wickedness, as also he was to be my example of goodness. I did not fully understand what the great Baptist preacher meant by the blasphemies which he charged himself with having uttered, but I had an idea that he must have employed some sort of jarring word, uttered deep and gutterally. From Nick's stock of dark profanities I had saved an expression which I felt would serve all the demands of blasphemy; and now that this was settled I began to cast about for the other iniquities necessary to establish a complete

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depravity. Bell-ringing was on Bunyan's list, and having full confidence in my model, I felt that it must be full of odious significance. But how was I to ring a bell? I could not climb into a church tower —the janitor stood guard, doubtless to prevent boys from committing the crime which I sought to add to my stock of sin. At last I was forced to a compromise, the adoption of a dinner-bell, and this I stole from the sideboard in the dining-room. I had worked myself into the belief that I was to hear voices, or perhaps to see an awful frown wrought black in the sky, and I took the bell with fear, expecting every moment to feel a shock sprung by the evil one. The sun was ablaze in the garden and the heavy-headed roses were slowly nodding in the indolent air; old hens and their brood scratched beneath the lilac bushes and refreshed themselves in the cooling soil; the scene was one of contentment. Up and down the path I strode, my ears nervously eager, my eyes strained upon the sky. At the sound of the bell the hens got up and shook themselves, and that was the only disturbance. I uttered my blasphemy, and then, having carried out the programme, I put the bell away and stood about waiting to be good. I had forced myself to believe that I was one of the wickedest of mortals, condemned by a special edict, and now I sought to make myself feel that I had been saved by an extraordinary grace. But my atmosphere was suddenly changed. Religious speculation was driven away by the smoke-breath of war. My father went away with the army. Time passed in jumps. One morning our town was filled with

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big men wearing blue coats. I talked with several of them as I swung on the gate, and their accent was harsh though their eyes were kindly. I imagined that they lived where the snow was always drifting; the negroes told me that they had stood the cold as long as they could and they were now making war on the South to keep from freezing to death. They did not bring a snow-storm with them; they kindled a fire that burned up the institution of slavery and scorched a new color upon our constitution.

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CHAPTER II.

OLD POLLY.

I was sent about from one school to another, the war seeming to have taken stability out of all things. At morning a building might hold a school and at evening a hospital. But it seems to me now that the boys learned with wonderful ease and quickness. We lived in a sharp air, keen with the scent of new ideas, and our blood bounded with the quick throb of war. Old things were passing away, and with the eyes of youth we saw the new things coming.

My mother died shortly after my father, broken in health, returned from the war. A number of years passed, cool years after the storm, and I was sent to the medical college at Nashville. Inasmuch as my father was a physician of skill and high repute, I had fancied that the doctor's handicraft should fall to me by a sort of inheritance, but it did not; and I was grieved to discover that a young fellow whose father had been a negro-trader was entitled to stand at the head of the class. He gave great promise as a surgeon, and I recall with a smile that my room-mate, who held a strong belief in heredity, explored the family path behind the negro-trader's son and found a butcher, renowned for his neatness in the trimming of beef.

My father died within a week after my college days were done. I remained in Gallatin long enough to

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see our old home filled with strangers, and then I set my face toward the adventurous West. Our estate had proved a mere shell, pretty without, but nothing within, and I had scarcely money enough to take me to the territory where many a fortune was waiting to be dug up. I practiced medicine, and in the magic garden I dug for a treasure, but found none. The years passed quickly—time in the West is not old enough to be sluggish. One night in my office I gave myself up to a discontented muse. My pulse had been beating high with the gambler's hope that with the next deal a winning hand would surely fall to me. But I had made no winning, and judgment, hope's cold critic, began to jeer at me. The sunlight on the lawn of my first home lay mellow and warm before me. The happiest days of my father's life had been spent there. Often I had heard him talk of the little brick office at the corner of the yard near the highway. He had sat there at night, listening to the flute of the wind and the banjo of the rain—there alone by the fire until someone rode through the big gate and rapped on the door with a switch to summon him out into the blustering dark. To me this had always seemed full of poetry, the rain, the wind, the fire and the man outside in the dark, lashing the door with his switch; and in my musing I said to myself: "What is life without poetry—not the rhymes that have been written and altered to restrict or swell an accent, but the subtle influence of weather, woods—nature that move men to write verse? I will go back there and establish myself in that office," I said aloud, and so

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moved was I that I arose and walked rapidly up and down the room. "I will have no ambition other than to be a country doctor. I will rent that old office, if I can, and settle down to practice in a neighborhood where there is a past—where a name is respected." On the following day I disposed of my effects and turned toward home. No railway had as yet split the quiet of the old pea-vine range, and at Gallatin I took a horse and set out over the quiet road. A turnpike ran as far as the foot of the ridge, and then a crooked "dirt" road wound its snaky way over the hills. I was at a loss as to the exact location of the old house. In the town I did not make inquiries; in fact I slipped through the place, feeling that I had come back a failure. I wondered whether the brick office had been permitted to stand during all these years. I was now nearly thirty, and twenty-six years must have passed since my father moved away. Perhaps the old house itself had been pulled down.

After having left the new West, how time-worn and neglected everything appeared; the gullied hillsides, the leaning houses, the orchards gnarled and blasted. The month was November, and whenever I stopped the horse to listen, which I did frequently, I could hear the chestnuts dropping in the woods. Surely my imagination had not overdrawn the poetic dreaminess of this timbered solitude. There were sounds, the creaking of wagons and the tones of man, speaking to caution his horses, going down a steep hill, but these sounds served only as the punctuation marks of silence. It was a day when no company could convince us that we were not alone.

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I asked a man whom I met in the road if he could direct me to the old Hudley homestead. With a puzzled look he took off his hat and with his knuckles slowly rubbed the side of his head.

"I know about where it ought to be," said he, "and it strikes me that it is about eight miles off to the left somewhere. Still, I don't claim to be certain, for I am somewhat of a stranger here and don't put up my word agin folks that have lived here longer. I didn't move in here till about ten year ago, and as I was free to say just now—and as I am just as free to say agin—that the old Hudley place is somewhere off to the left about eight miles. Putty fair lookin' hoss you've got there."

"Eight miles to the left. Then I have come a long distance out of my way."

"I don't know how fur out of your way you've come—I ain't lived here long enough to set up my opinion. I've got a nag that I wouldn't mind swopping for that hoss."

"I see that the road forks down there," said I, not to be diverted by horse-talk. "The left fork leads in my direction, I should think."

"Yes," he replied, putting on his hat and looking up at me with a dry grin, "if you want to go to the left I'd naturally 'low that the left-hand prong is the one to take you there. You couldn't go to the left so mighty pert if you take the right-hand prong. My nag is a sorrel. Won't you come over and look at him? It ain't more than four mile from here."

I declined his offer and rode on, and looking back I saw him standing in the road rubbing his head

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with his knuckles. He had given me an inkling of the drollery I was to find among the people of the pea-vine settlement—had turned up the light of recollection and had thrown a mellow ray on many a character sketch drawn by my father.

I followed the left fork of the road till it was hidden under a mat of leaves showered down by the November breeze, and then I lost it. My intention was to inquire at a farm-house and take a fresh start, but to find a house in this wilderness was almost in the nature of an original discovery. No fields now lay within my range. I was among the knobs, where the land was not worth cultivating. In the hazy air the sun had lost his splendor and now hung dull and red above the tree-tops of a distant hill. Evening came and still no road and no house. Now I walked and led the horse down the steep slopes and up through the tangled underbrush. I heard the nervous bark of a fox. From on high in the misty moonlight came the squawk of a bird flying southward. A weak light came feebly up the glen. The horse neighed. He had hung back, but now I had to step briskly to keep him from stumbling upon my heels. The glen widened; the underbrush which seemed to hold the darkness close down to earth, fell away, and at the end of an avenue of moonshine arose a yellow eye slowly blinking—a candle. As I drew near a host of dogs rushed out to bark at me and to snap and snarl among themselves. I gave a loud call. Someone stepped out into a passage and held a light aloft by way of answer. I asked if I might come in and a voice cried:

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"Yes, and don't mind the dogs, for they won't bite you."

"They'll eat you up," another voice exclaimed, coming from somewhere in the darkness.

"No, they won't," the first voice insisted. "Come right on in."

"Rush will bite his legs," the mysterious voice declared. "He tore a man all to pieces yesterday."

"Lady," cried the first voice, "will you keep quiet? That's right, just step this way. Look out there. The end of the log step has rotted off and you might fall if you are not careful. We've been intending to put in another log and we will as soon as we get the time. Get away, Rush. He won't bite you. Come in."

I stepped into the broad passageway and the dogs capered about me as I strode across the floor, following a woman who carried a candle with one hand, shielding the blaze with the other.

"Step right in," she said, opening a door, and I entered a large room where a cheerful fire was burning. She put her hand on the back of a large willow chair and bade me sit down, and how soft was the seat after I had ridden all day on a hard saddle. I glanced about the room, so cheerful with its log fire, its cat, its spinning-wheel and great feather-bed, covered with a snow-white counterpane. Having placed the candle on the mantel-piece, the woman sat down, put aside a small red shawl which she had worn on her head, and with both hands began to smooth back her gray hair. She was old, and I noticed that one corner of her mouth had been

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borne down by the constant pressure of a pipestem.

"The negro boy will take your horse," she said. "Of course you will want him fed, even if you do decide to go on to-night."

"Was it the negro boy who insisted that the dogs would tear me to pieces?" I asked.

"Oh, dear no," she said, getting up to snuff the candle. "I wouldn't put up with such impudence from him," she added, sitting down.

"I remember now that you addressed some one as Lady."

"Yes, sir. But I must see about gettin' you something to eat, for of course you haven't had any supper. You must have got lost, for if you hadn't you would have come on the other side of the house. The big road's over that way," she said, pointing. I protested against putting her to any trouble, but she bounded up with spryness, thrust a shovel into the fire and brought it out full of glowing coals. Then she almost trotted through a doorway, a ruddy light following her into the darkness. I heard her moving the lids of a stove and soon I sniffed the incense of a coffee-pot.

While I sat there, glancing about the room, I chanced to look toward the door through which I had entered, and I beheld a pair of large black eyes gazing at me. I could see nothing but the eyes, for darkness lay about the door. Surely they were the eyes of a fawn, half frightened, half surprised. I leaned over to get a better view. The eyes disappeared, like two coals of fire doused in water, and the door closed with a loud snap.

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"Walk out to supper if you please," said the hostess, appearing in the kitchen door. "Of course I expect folks more or less, for this is the only place they can stop between here and the foot of the ridge. But they have to put up with the best I have. Wait just a moment. There's a kitten wrapped up in that chair. We have been nursing it. Take this chair, please; and just help yourself to such as you find, which ain't much. You don't live about here, I take it."

"No, I'm from Colorado."

"You don't say so," she replied. "But it's getting so you never can tell where a body's from."

"Have you been living here long?" I inquired.

"Dear me, yes, I was born here."

"Then you probably know where the old Hudley place is."

"Law me, I reckon I do. It ain't more than three miles from here by the road and little upward of a mile through the woods. I never knew anybody in all my life any better than I did Dr. Hudley."

"He was my father."

"What!" the old woman cried, springing to her feet, "you don't mean to tell me that you are Little Mitford Hudley?"

"I don't mean to tell you that I am Little anybody, but I am Mitford Hudley."

"What, Little Mitford a great big man? Why, dear me, I never would have believed it. Oh, I know the years have gone by, but I never could think of you except as Little Mitford. Well, well. Let me get hold of you."

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She grabbed me and then stood for a time with her hands on my shoulders, as if to hold me within her vision. "Well, well. But you don't know who I am, do you? Of course you don't. You must have heard your father speak of me a thousand times, I know. Yes, more than that, for I am Polly Billings."

It was now my turn to grab her. Her name brought up the lamplight of long ago, my mother, my father and the family joke. Her name was an apology. Her house was not well kept; nothing was right and no meal which she served was worth eating. She apologized for the honey, fresh from the bees; she made excuses for the water, just from the bluff spring, and my father declared that she once apologized for the moon, which she knew was not so full nor so bright at her house as at other places.

"But I am keeping you from eating your supper," she said, stepping back. "But gracious knows we've got nothing fit to eat. Don't drink that coffee. I know it ain't good—and that butter, it oughtn't never to have been put on the table. Well, I do hope you'll make out, but I don't see how you can. See that room right off there?" she said, pointing. "That shed room? Your father has slept there many a night, and him and John Billings would talk and talk till I thought I'd never get a wink of sleep. John was my husband, but he died long before you could recollect; yes and he died right there in the shed room where your father used to sleep and where you are to sleep to-night. Why, they'd talk and talk, first one and then the other, and laugh fit

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to kill themselves. And at the foolishest things you ever heard of in your life. They were a constantly a pokin' of their fun at me, but bless you I didn't care, for I always had so much on my mind."

Out in the dark passage there was a smothered giggle, and the cry of a voice full of laughter—"Oh, Little Mitford." Then came the hastening of light feet, and peals of laughter floated in from the outer darkness. I looked at Polly Billings.

"No kith nor kin of mine," she said, "but it's all right. Don't let it worry you. Law me, I don't know when I have been as glad to see a body. It's fetchin' the past right back and holdin' it under my eyes. Have some of them peach preserves. They ain't fit to eat, but you've got to eat something, goodness knows."

"A girl?" I asked, nodding toward the passage.

She assumed a sad look and slowly nodded. "It's Lady Edwards, poor child."

"If she's a poor thing what about her?"

The old woman tapped her forehead. "Wrong up here. And I do reckon that she's as putty a creature as you ever seen. And smart. But you'll hear about her."

"Can't you tell me? I have seen her eyes and I have heard her voice and I am interested."

Polly Billings slowly shook her head. "Far be it from me to speak of the misfortunes of anybody. I could keep you up till twelve o'clock listenin' about her, but I won't. I took her, and I ain't sorry, for she is a heap of company; I don't care if she ain't got what folks are pleased to call common-sense. Of

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course, she's bad at times, poor thing, but she can't help that. Luke Radshaw says she played on the hillside till she got the sunshine mixed up in her voice. But far be it from me to say anything more about her misfortune than I can help. There never was nothin' sadder than what she went through with, and it makes me shudder every time I think about it, and I won't talk about it now. Luke Radshaw appears to know more about the condition of her mind than anybody else. He's got a good deal of learnin' himself. He had to have, for he was county surveyor one term, and it must take a mighty smart man for that place. Just step right into the sitting-room, for it's more comfortable in there."

The log fire was purring. I took the soft willow chair, again thankful that I was not bestride a hard saddle. The wind was stirring the tree-tops, and I could hear the leaves drifting against the house. How strange it was that this old woman should be there with me—this personification of an old joke—a moldy pleasantry from the past. But I was now more interested in the present—the girl. I was afraid that I had driven her from the fire, out among the scurrying leaves.

"Why doesn't the girl come in where it is warm?" I asked.

"Who, Lady? Oh, she'll come in if she wants to. But she's just as well off out there. Why, she lives in the woods half the time, winter or summer. The weather never makes much difference to her."

I wanted to know more of the strange creature whose eyes had glowed at me out of the dark, and I

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asked a number of questions, but Polly Billings was at all times prepared to put me off with an evasion.

"By the way, who's living at our old place?" I asked.

"Why," my hostess exclaimed, "I meant to tell you long ago. And it's Luke Radshaw, and here I've been talkin' about him right along. He didn't buy the place from the doctor, you understand; but he bought it from Mason, the man who did buy it from the doctor. And Mason—you don't recollect him; but what a man he was. He drank up all his wife's substance and then marched off to the war and was killed—killed when it was too late, I was about to say. Ah me, how many people fail to die till it's too late. But about Luke Radshaw, yes. Well, he bought the place from Mason and he lives there now, and his wife is the fattest woman in this country. They've got a son, but I don't think he amounts to much, a race-horsin' and a fiddlin' around the neighborhood."

"Is the little brick office standing yet?'

"Yes, and jest as it was when your father sat there a young man, waitin' for folks to call him up. It's occupied, too, by a doctor; Hatch is his name, but I reckon he is as poor an excuse as ever flung a pair of saddle-bags across a nag. He was goin' to see Fletch Martin—you've heard your father talk about old Fletch—and Fletch didn't get any better. Hatch give him all sorts of stuff and finally thought the best thing he could do was to give him up, and it did seem so, for Fletch lay there from mornin' to till night a-stretchin' after his breath. Well, he was

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give up by the doctor and then the folks came in to see him die. Fletch's son wan't satisfied with the way the case had been handled, and so he sent down over the ridge after another doctor. He came, and the first thing everybody knowed old Fletch began to get better; and it wan't long till he was up and about. And how do you think Dr. Hatch took it? He got mad at the family,—said they hadn't treated him right, and he swore that if he ever met that other doctor he'd tan his hide and hang it on the fence to dry. Law me, what funny things do happen."

"I was thinking," said I, as much to myself as to Polly Billings, "that I would like to buy out his practice and settle down in the old office."

"Well, now, it won't take much to buy his practice, I can tell you that. He's got a case of consumption over at Moore's—and I reckon he's willin' to sell that cheap enough—and a case of typhoid at Harkrider's and a few other complaints here and there. That's all, and it won't take much to buy his interest. But you look mighty tired and I reckon you want to go to bed. Take that candle and go right into the shed room, where your father used to sleep. I reckon it's about as poor a bed as you ever saw, and the room itself ain't hardly fit to sleep in, but you'll have to put up with many an inconvenience if you stay about here. Well, good-night," she added as I took the candle from the mantel-piece. "I ain't got over my surprise at seein' you yet, and I'm goin' to set here till I figger it out even if it takes half the night."

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The bed was as white as a snow-drift and as soft as the down of a dove. The night was breathing hard, and the leaves drifted against the house, and I thought that from out in the dark came a voice full of laughter—and "Oh, you are not Little Mitford."

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CHAPTER III.

THE OLD SUNLIGHT.

Late at night I awoke and heard the soft patter of rain on the moss-covered roof. The feeling inspired was so comforting that I strove to keep awake; to listen and to muse was more restful than to sleep. The first consciousness of life could not have been sweeter; the low roof, the patter, the luxurious bed and the soft air, scented with the midnight fragrance of the woods. I dozed into a dream so near to wakefulness that it was half a thoughtful reverie, but the faint drip, drip of water into the rain-barrel lulled my senses into deeper listlessness, and I dreamed that Old Polly conducted me to a place where a doctor stood upon a box, trying to sell at public auction a number of diseases in which he held a questionable interest.

The day was not yet spread broad upon the land when there came an awakening rap on the door.

"Come, get up to breakfast," Old Polly cried. "You won't get anything fit to eat, but you've got to have something. You'll find a washpan full of water on a bench at the back door, if the fetchtaked dogs haven't lapped it up, and right by it on a chair there is a towel, if the calves haven't chawed it up. I reckon you are glad enough to git up, for I know in reason you haven't slept a wink, the bed and the

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room are so bad, but we have to put up with the best we can find these days."

I shouted out that I had passed a delightful night, and pretending not to have heard me, she turned upon the dogs to scold them out of the passage. I nourished a hope that the mysterious girl might appear at the breakfast table. Her voice had left a sweet echo in my ear. Her eyes threw a soft light upon my inner vision.

Old Polly stood at the head of the table, pouring the coffee. I asked her why the young woman did not come to breakfast. She waited till I had sat down and then she said: "It's not because she is afraid, but on account of one of her tantrums. You never know what she's goin' to do. Lady," she called, stepping to the door, "why don't you come and see Dr. Hudley?"

"Who, Little Mitford?" came rippling down the stairway.

"Come down and see."

"Is Little Mitford a great big man?" And down the stairway her laughter seemed to pour like mint-sweetened water tumbling over the old stones in the meadow of our childhood.

"She won't come," said Old Polly. "Now just help yourself. The biscuit promised to be good, but they ain't half baked, and the coffee is wretched I know." She looked hard at me for a moment or two, and then she went on: "I never did expect to see any of your family again. Why, I had often thought of you, a little bit of a feller. But I never was more surprised than when you told me that you

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were the doctor's son. Law me, it don't seem more than day before yesterday since you all left the neighborhood. I reckon you've seen a good deal of the world, but you jest had to come back to old Sumner County. And you know it has been said by smart men that if you have ever drunk out of Caney Fork Creek you've got to come back and drink again, it makes no difference how far away you git. I reckon, too, that there's a good deal of truth in it, for not more than five months ago they brought old Miss Mag Benson back from California to get one more drink before she died. She said she knowed it wouldn't cure her, but it would make her die happier, and it did. Help yourself to the ham."

I took a piece of ham and she begged me to put it back upon the platter, declaring that it was not good. I told her that not since my childhood had I found anything to awaken such gastronomical gratitude as her cooking and the manner in which her table was arranged. Her eyes brightened, her chin wrinkled, and with emotional twitchings of the mouth she said:

"Ah, Lord, there was a time when I could cook, and when I had something that was worth cooking, but we have to put up with what we can get these miserable days."

She wiped her eyes on her apron, turned about to scold a dog, and once more declared that she had never been so surprised as when I told her that Dr. Hudley was my father. Then I asked her for directions to the old Hudley place, and in giving them she must have related a complete history of

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her life. Sometimes she would wander up Caney Fork and sometimes down; sometimes she would strike across the country in a dead heat, as if in pursuit of a fox—and then she would seemingly halt, sit down under a tree, and lift her apron to fan breath into her exhausted body. I remarked that everything in the community was of interest to me, but that really I should like to know the way to the old Hudley place.

"That's just what I am doing," she said. "And at the corner you come to the old Bethpage place. Old Sam Bethpage and your grandfather came to this part of the country at the same time. Law me. And old Tuck Bethpage is livin' there now, and a stingier mortal never skun a flea for his hide and tallow. When his wife died, about eighteen year ago, he wouldn't let them buy a new dress for her to be buried in—he 'lowed that any dress that was good enough to wear to church was plenty good to wear to eternity, and so they buried her in one of her made-over dresses. And it wan't long after that till he was scoutin' around among the young women. Yes, give it right out that he wanted a gal. I wan't as old then as I am now, and John Billings hadn't been dead more than five year, and I didn't know but he might take it into his head to come courtin' of me. So I kept a kittle of water on the fire all the time, and please the Lord if he had come pokin' his nose in at my door I would have scalded the skin off'n it."

"This road that passes the house," I interrupted, "does it lead to the old place?"

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"Why, all you've got to do is to turn to the right when you come to the old Bethpage place. But don't be in such a hurry to go over there now. You've plenty of time, and besides I want to talk to you, for I have just begun to realize that you have come. As we grow older it takes us longer to fasten a thing on our minds. You don't recollect the Silvesters, do you? Of course not, for they didn't move in here till long after your folks moved out, and they didn't amount to nothin' nohow. But they are all dead now, anyway—that is, all except Clara, and she teaches school and boards at Luke Radshaw's. You'll see her, of course, and you'll see a mighty smart girl when you look at her. She went to school in town and a good many people thought it made her uppish, and I reckon it did. Must you really be goin'? Now, you won't forget the way over here, will you? Your father wasn't too proud to come to see us, and I do reckon he was as good a doctor as ever you'll be, although I guess doctors have nearly twice as many of them shiny knives and nippers as they used to have."

When I mounted to ride away she stood at the gate, winding her net of directions about me, and at last I had to break the meshes to escape. As I rode off a voice cried, "Good-by, Little Mitford," and as I quickly looked around I caught sight of a dark head as it dodged behind the house. I knew that the old woman would not accept pay for her hospitality, so I left a dollar on the table, but I had not gone far when I heard her shouting at me. I

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halted and she came up almost in a breathless state, so hard had she run across a field to head me off.

"Oh, you needn't think you can play any of your tricks on me," she cried, panting at the fence and holding aloft the dollar. "Goodness me, I owe your father hundreds of dollars and here you come and leave money on my table."

"Buy a ribbon with it for the mysterious head of hair I saw dodging behind the house," I replied and switched the horse into a gallop. She shouted at me, but I did not stop, nor did I tighten rein till I had left her field far behind, so fearful was I that she might cut across in some mysterious way and intercept me again.

The wind and the rain had stripped the trees and the road was covered with brown leaves. But the vines clinging to the timber were not yet naked, and many an oak stood barbaric, with a sash of gold and crimson wound about his rugged loins. The sun came out and sprinkled the leafy road with stars and threw a diamond necklace upon the shumac bush. A cock quail arose with a flutter, shook a pearl from his crest, flew far across a field and melted in the sun. I came to a creek, no doubt the endeared stream of Caney Fork, dismounted, parted the leaves and drank of the amber water. Just as I mounted a man on an iron gray horse and a loud-creaking saddle overtook me. He gave me a profound bow, not forgetting to eye me with curiosity, and remarked upon the beauty of the morning.

"A morning picked from among a million," I said with enthusiasm.

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He laughed and expressed his belief that I must be from a northern climate.

"I am from the West where there are months of fine days every year, but they are too new to have a history behind them," and then afraid that he might smile at my ardor I added: "I know there is not much history here, but men live here who rode forth to welcome old Jackson when he came home from his victories."

"School-teacher?" he asked, stroking his yellow beard.

"No, I am a doctor."

"That so? I am too," he replied, holding up a pair of saddle-bags which had escaped my notice. "And I might almost wish that I was anything else. I am tempted to hope that you are not thinking of locating here."

"I have come many miles for that purpose," I rejoined.

"Then, sir, I am sorry for both of us. This part of the country is pretty thickly settled, but it's poor picking for a doctor. You spoke of men from this neighborhood going out to meet old Jackson. I don't know whether they did or not, but they could have done so, inasmuch as this neighborhood is noted for its pensioners of 1812. And when one of them gets sick the chances are that his time has come, and it isn't much credit to a physician to doctor men who are called home. Yes, sir, this country is starvingly healthful. You spoke of having come a long distance to practice here. That's something I don't understand."

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"I was moved by a sentiment," said I. "My father began life here as a physician, and I heard him express many a regret that he had suffered ambition to lead him away from his little office at the corner of the yard near the highway. His name was Hudley, and I presume you are Dr. Hatch, and occupy his old office."

"I am the man," he answered with a laugh. "And you are Dr. Hudley's son? Why, his name is a household word in this neighborhood. I am glad to meet you."

We shook hands and rode for a time in silence. After telling me again that he was glad to see me—and I have no doubt that he was—he said: "I am not much given to moving about, but I may say frankly that it wouldn't take much of a jolt to dislodge me. The fact is I am suffering from a sentiment something similar to your own. I started in to practice about thirty miles from here across the country, and I'd like to go back there. When your father moved it was evidently his intention to start in town as fresh as he could, so he left a good many of his old books with my predecessor. I bought them, and while surgery has made great advancement our general practice has not discovered many short cuts toward a cure of old-time disease. These books are well preserved and—"

"You don't have to talk up my father's books to me," I broke in, delighted at the prospects of recovering not only the old office, but also the old surroundings.

"Oh, I don't mean to do that," he protested, halt-

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ing and nodding toward a lane. "I turn off here. What I mean is, that I can offer you a very comfortable establishment. And after all, the practice is not so bad. I suppose you will go to Radshaw's, your old home. I'll be in my office about eight o'clock this evening. Come down and see me."

Upon coming abreast of a house which I took to be the old Bethpage place I turned to the right and had ridden but a short distance when a negro boy hailed me from an orchard. I waited for him to climb the fence, and as he drew nearer a look of disappointment crossed his face. He said that he took me to be Dr. Hatch, till I turned and showed him I had no beard. But he added that I was dressed up like a doctor or a preacher, and if I happed to be either he wished I would go to the house to see Mr. Tuck Bethpage, who had been taken suddenly ill. I turned about, tied my horse to a post and entered the house. In the long hall an old woman met me, and she too appeared disappointed at seeing that I was not Dr. Hatch. I told her I was a physician, come upon an emergency.

"Then I am glad to see you," she said, looking at me not without suspicion. "My brother was taken sick this morning and I wish you would come in and see him."

I followed her into a large room. On a bed lay an old man. His eyebrows were bushy and his nose was broad and thin. I introduced myself. He muttered a word of surprise and held out his hand.

"I haven't a stock of medicine with me," said I,

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"but I may be able to help you." I made a motion to take his hand, but he drew it back.

"What are you a doctor for if you haven't got medicine? I'm as sick as a horse."

I explained to him that I had just arrived, and after telling him my name again he suffered me to take his hand. His pulse was quick, but he had no fever. I looked at his tobacco-stained tongue and might as well have looked at the sole of his foot.

"Pains," he said. "Pains, full of them, and if I ever eat another persimmon puddin' I hope the Lord will snatch me off."

"You oughtn't to have eaten so much, brother," said the woman, standing at the foot of the bed.

"Much! How much do you call much? I eat what old Radshaw sent over. But if he eat as much I'll lay a thousand dollars he's dead right now. Been waiting for persimmons to get ripe and they knocked me down the very first flirt. Yes, sir, old Radshaw is dead."

I gave him a mixture of ginger and brandy which soon relieved the gripings in his stomach. He sat up, looked around, shook his head and put forth his hand.

"On your father's account," he said, taking my hand. "I knew him as well as anybody. And I think you'll make just about such a doctor as he was. Nine of them out of ten would have given me something to keep me lying here flat on my back for a month just to bleed me. All a doctor wants these days is to bleed a man."

"They are not so much given to bleeding as they were in the old days," I ventured to remark.

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He turned his sharp old nose toward me and drew down his eyebrows till the two thickets met.

"They are more in favor of one sort of bleeding, sir," he said. "Hatch kept me in bed a week and charged me three dollars. Just think of it, three dollars for being sick a week. So you have come back to drink of old Caney Fork, have you? Nancy, fetch my slippers; I'm going to get up."

"Oh, not so soon, brother," she protested.

"Fetch my slippers. If I lay here much longer I'm afraid he'll keep me here. Three dollars for a week in bed! You may not suspect it, sir, seeing me in this fix, but I am a gentleman. Why, my father and your grandfather came to this State together. Hah, and that reminds me. Nancy, bring something for the doctor to drink."

Before I could protest the sister asked in a low voice: "Shall I bring some of the old wine?"

A frown of distress crossed his face. "Not that," he said in a broken voice. "Get him some—do you drink, doctor?" he broke off.

"I have come back to drink the water of Caney Fork," I replied, and he cackled with delight. "That's it," he said. "Yes, sir, that's the way to talk. Never mind about getting anything, Nancy. And now what are you going to charge me for giving me some of my own brandy and ginger?" he asked. "Remember I didn't send for you. What are you going to charge me for my own medicine, hah?"

"Nothing," I answered, and he cackled again.

"Ah, you are like your father," he went on, looking about on the floor for the slippers which his

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sister had put beside the bed. "Yes, sir, and you will do well here. Ah, I feel all right now. Where are you going to establish yourself, doctor?"

"In the old office, I trust," I answered, getting up to take my leave.

"I hope so; yes, I hope so. But don't be in a hurry. It is not very far from dinner time, is it? Oh, yes," he added, frowning at the great clock in the corner. "Oh, yes, it is a long time. Well, I'll walk out into the hall with you. Fine old house, don't you think? Built of brick made by my father's negroes. But there is no young woman here to lighten it up, eh? Hah, we must have young women."

"There are too many young women now for the good of the country," said his sister Nancy as we stepped out into the hall.

The old man looked back at her and then remarked to me: "An old woman has a contempt for the young, but an old man makes a goddess of a girl. And I'll get one yet if you don't look out. Hah, the first thing you know. Well," he added as we reached the door, "I am glad to welcome you to the neighborhood. It is a hospitable old community, sir. I wish you a good day, and hope you may call sometime not in the line of your profession."

I looked back and saw his sharp nose thrust through the door. He could be courtly in manner, and he had the appearance of a gentleman, but I hardly knew what to make of him. I had grown up in the belief that the Southerner presented the most nearly perfect type of gentleman; I had read that all well-to-do men of the South were almost waste-

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fully generous, but this old man was a contemptuous niggard. I recalled what Old Polly had said of him —that a stingier mortal never skinned a flea for its hide and tallow.

Along the road were orchards red with apples. I heard the groaning of a cider mill; I saw a boy, hovering over a barrel, sucking cider through a straw. A yelping dog chased a rabbit across the road. The boy bounded up and clapped his hands.

Wood-peckers, refugees from the freezing North, were screaming with delight in the hazy air. I had been accustomed to look upon mountains capped with snow, but here the hills seemed soft in a velvet brown. Just in front of me was a heavy piece of timber. Beyond it arose a coil of smoke. At the edge of the timber the road turned slightly. Suddenly I halted with a quick catch of breath. There by the roadside was my father's old office; there was the log house built by my grandfather; there was the sunlight lying on the lawn.

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CHAPTER IV.

The scene was just as I had pictured it. At the big gate near the office I dismounted and stood with my arms resting on the low rail fence. How venerable the old place appeared. The north side of the office was green with moss. The house looked like a fortress, so heavy were the logs. I remembered to have heard a Scandinavian say that he had seen a log house in Norway a thousand years old. This one looked as if it had stood for ages, so soon do new things become old in the woods of America. I could now recall many a feature that had passed out of my mind, a hillock thought to be an Indian mound, a big rock at the upper corner of the yard, and a poplar tree whose top branches I had fancied swept the sky when a storm was blowing.

I led the horse through the gate, tied him to a rack and advanced toward the house. A friendly dog came bounding down the path. A woman, great in size, came out into the broad passage that ran through the middle of the house, shaded her eyes with her hand, turned and said to someone inside: "Father, here comes somebody, a stranger."

A tall man walked out into the passage, looked at me, and then stepped down into the yard. I came forward, playing with the friendly dog.

"It's not worth while to tell you that he won't

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bite," said the man; "but he'll get you dirty with his paws. . Go 'way, Bose. Step right in, sir."

His manner was so cordial that it did not occur to me to introduce myself to him; indeed, it seemed to me that we had long known each other, so, after holding out my hand and receiving a pressure from his warm palm, I followed him into the house, the dog playing about us. At the door of the sitting-room the dog halted, evidently catching sight of the woman, and scampered off. The woman got up as we entered, and the window sash rattled as she trod across the floor.

"Sit down," said the man, and the woman looked at me with a smile of inquiry, and upon my mind it then dawned that I had spoken no word of introduction.

"Have I the pleasure to stand in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Radshaw?" I asked, and then felt embarrassed at the pretentious sound of my words.

"Yes, sir," the man answered; "but you might as well sit down."

"I thank you, sir, for I cannot feel that I am wholly a stranger in a house built by my grandfather. I am Dr. Mitford Hudley's son."

"No!" cried Radshaw, with a rousing laugh, and he seized my hand. "Why, bless you! your father was one of the best friends I ever had. Mother, did you hear him? Dr. Hudley's son."

She gave me her fat hand, her eyes beaming with the light of welcome. "Well, I declare!" she said, searching my face as if to establish family resemblances. "I told father this morning that somebody

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must be coming, for my nose kept itching all the time."

Old Luke winked at me. "You can't get away from a woman's wisdom," said he. "But sit down, and let us get at the situation of affairs. Hudley's son," he added, looking at me when we had sat down. "And you look like him, with your broad shoulders, but you've got your mother's eyes."

"His mother's eyes were black, and his are brown," Mrs. Radshaw spoke up, passing her hand over her face and slowly rocking herself.

"All right," the husband assented; "but his eyes—"

"Are brown, and his mother's eyes were black," she insisted. "Don't I know? She was a Winchester, and nearly all the Winchesters had black eyes."

"Well, now, hold on a minute," said old Luke. "I was as well acquainted with Dave Winchester as I am with anybody, an' if his eyes wan't blue—"

"I said nearly all had black eyes," Mrs. Radshaw maintained, compressing her lips and bowing to me.

Into the old man's eyes there came a comical squint. "She's got me," he said. "But it makes no difference. And so you have come back? How did that happen? But I needn't ask that. It's the case of the young deer, sir. You may drive a fawn from a scrub-oak knob where there's nothing for him to eat but twigs and moss—drive him off down into the valley where the grass is sweet and rich, and he'll wander back to the knob and browse on dry sticks. And I suppose you know what they say about the water of old Caney Fork—drink once,

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drink again. Well, sir, we're glad of the chance to welcome your return to the toddling ground of your childhood. Things come around in a most unexpected way. Year before last one of the Towsley boys came back from Texas after having been gone more than thirty years, and about the first thing he did was to drop right down on the gravel and souse his head into old Caney Fork. Now, tell us all about yourself."

They knew of the death of my parents, and had heard of my drifting away. I gave an account of my life in the West, and the old man put his hand behind his ear and leaned forward to catch every accent, as if I were a minstrel come to sing the song of a strange land. I told him that one night ambition had fluttered out of my breast, like a tired bird, and that I then decided humbly to return to my native hills.

"The deer come back to the scrub-oak knob," said the old man, his eyes moist.

"Where the range, though not luscious with rich grasses, is sweet with the buds of recollection," I spoke up, and the old man nodded and his wife slowly rocked herself. "And I have come back to ride over the bridle paths that my father made." Then I told them of my having seen Dr. Hatch, and of my engagement to meet him in his office at eight o'clock.

"Well, now, I know everybody will be glad if you get back into your father's office," said the old man, and not satisfied with merely his own assertion, he called upon his wife for proof, which she gave with

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convincing readiness. Then old Luke began to tell me of the many things that had happened since the dawn of my recollection, and I pretended to give him the warm ear of a quickened interest; but I sat deep in a museful mood, as if listening to a wandering tune, catching the rise and fall of a familiar note now and then. But, though half dreaming, I remembered afterward that I saw everything with sharp distinctness—the home-woven carpet, the old horse-hair sofa, the heavy oak clothes press, the great fireplace, the flagstone hearth, a string of red pepper hung high in a corner, a slow-ticking clock. The old woman was knitting. Polly Billings had given me a glimpse of the Radshaw household, of the son's horse-racing spirit, of the school teacher's brightness, of old Luke's learning; and the glimpse, so far as I could now judge, might have been aslant and distorted, but in one particular the gossip had fallen short of the truth—the size of Mrs. Radshaw. I would not hazard a guess as to her weight, but I noticed that when she got up to see about dinner the broad doorway made a snug frame for her as she passed out. Old Luke was a striking picture of rural manhood. His eyes were prominent, his nose forceful, and his mouth firm. He wore whiskers; his broad upper lip was bare. His complexion was of a light brown, rich with the hue of health. He appeared to be strong, but not noticeably active. But he made no false motions—every movement counted for something. His iron-gray hair stood up straight in front. His countenance presented a strange anomaly—the effect of one eye full of mischief, the

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other full of sadness. I learned of him before I had known him long that if something amused him at morning he would sometimes go all day with a smile parting his lips. In the South bravery cuts a broad swath through the field of social affairs; and I was told that old Luke, if he had ever been introduced to fear, had never after recognized it as an acquaintance. He was assuring me that in the event that Dr. Hatch and I should make a trade he would send my horse back to its owner in Gallatin, when Mrs. Radshaw appeared in the doorway and announced that dinner was ready. Just the merest murmur of an apology was to be heard as we sat down to the table. She had been taken by surprise.

"Why," said old Luke, winking at me, "I thought that you expected someone. You said your nose itched."

She laughed, and the walls seemed to shake with her. Good humor was at home in the old house—its freedom proved that it was not merely a chance visitor. I asked concerning the son, and they told me that he had gone to town early that morning. I spoke of Miss Silvester, the teacher, and the old man said that she took her dinner to school, and would not be back until evening. I told them of my night at the house of Polly Billings, and Radshaw laughed and his wife shook the walls with her fat sides.

"Of course, you had nothing that was fit to eat," said Luke. "I warrant that when she comes to die she will apologize to the Lord for not having a death fit to die," and at this his wife did not laugh, but there

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was a merry twinkle in her eyes when, in a voice dry with forced solemnity, she said:

"Father, there is such a thing as going too far. She may spend her life in apologizing to man, but her soul won't need to make an apology when it goes home."

"I guess you are right," Luke replied, balancing a spoon on the rim of his cup.

"By the way," said I, "she has a dark-haired girl living with her."

"Yes, Lady Edwards," the old man replied. "A mighty sad case, too."

"I caught merely a glimpse of her, once of her eyes as she peeped through the door, and again of her head the next morning as she dodged behind the house. My curiosity was aroused, but the old woman would tell me nothing about her, except that her head was wrong and that she had taken her long ago."

The old man laughed. "Why, it would have required the sheriff and all his deputies to have kept Miss Polly from taking her. But it's a sad story. I'll tell it to you sometime."

I was curious to know the story. The girl's eyes, lustrous in the dark, haunted me, and in my fancy her graceful head was constantly dodging. Was the story so sad that no one cared to tell it? The old man talked on other subjects, but I could not follow him. I saw his face lighten and darken, but his words were almost without import. I saw him laugh, and I imagined that I felt the shaking response of his wife, but to me it was all dull and

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meaningless. We sat long at the table, and when we arose the sun had slipped aslant and was blazing upon the brown top of a far-off hill, as if in reproduction of an altar lighted for the fire worship of a prehistoric giant. We walked about the old place, halting at a fence and gazing over into a field where negroes were gathering corn. We went to a spring that boiled out of the ground at the base of a great yellow rock, and here we sat down to rest, listening to the gurgle of the water and the soft murmur of the air in the tops of the trees.

"I have worked hard all my life," said the old man, "and last year I came to the conclusion that if I was to have any rest this side of the grave it was time to take it; so since then I have labored only when in the humor. It was once my ambition to own large tracts of land, but a man's mind can't lie at ease on acres. You struck me when you said that ambition had fluttered out of your breast, like a tired bird. I know exactly how you felt. I have had more than one ambition in my breast. On several occasions I have been a candidate for office, and once I was elected county surveyor. But, as a general thing, I fell short of election—put too much faith in what men told me. The average politician is a liar, but he is a more intelligent liar than the average voter. The ballot-box is the liar womb of the world."

I looked at him as he sat on a stone, his hat at his feet, his hair standing straight, and he reminded me of an old lion, cowed with defeat.

"I had great hopes of my son Glich," he said, his

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voice deep with sadness and a soft light beaming in his eyes. He was a study, and I sat almost enchanted with the play of his countenance. "I don't know why he was ever called Glich," he said, with a smile. "His mother fished up the name from some family mill-pond. I sent him to school till it sickened him. I wanted him to be a lawyer, but his heart was set on fishing, horse-racing, and fox-hunting. I thought he would outgrow his tastes, but he hasn't. Well, suppose we go to the house?"

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CHAPTER V.

MISS SILVESTER.

As we stepped into the passage, entering the house from the back way, I saw a young woman coming up the path. Luke bade me step in and make myself at home, adding that he had to look after his affairs at the barn. He noticed that I was looking down toward the big gate, and supposing that I was thinking of my horse, he said: "He was taken care of long ago, and is now up to his ears in clover hay. I'll be back after a while."

I entered the room, sat down, took up a worn book, and was turning the leaves when a young woman came to the door. She halted at seeing me, but came forward with a smile. I arose.

"Keep your seat," she said, "and you needn't introduce yourself," she added, with a laugh. "Miss Polly came over to the schoolhouse this morning, so I know all about you."

"You are Miss Silvester," I said, bowing.

"Yes. Have you a knife? Lend it to me, please. I want to sharpen a pencil. I have to correct some compositions to-night, and am too lazy to use a pen."

"You look the opposite of lazy," I replied, handing her my knife.

"Well, let me say nervous," she rejoined, sitting down and beginning to sharpen the pencil.

"Let me take it."

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"No, thank you," she said, without looking up from her occupation.

She was tall and strikingly graceful. Her eyes were very large and gray, her brow was broad and low, and her hair was the color of a chestnut fresh from the bur. Looking straight into her eyes I thought she was handsome, but when she turned her face her profile jarred me just a trifle—her nose gave her too much the resemblance of an Indian. She got up to throw the pencil shavings into the fire, and her grace inspired in me a feeling that I can liken to nothing but gladness. She put the pencil on the mantel-piece and returned my knife.

"Everyone will be pleased to know that you have come back," she said, resuming her seat; "but why you have retired from the world into this convent of the woods I can't understand." She smiled and her eyes were full of light.

"Perhaps it is because I want to be one of Nature's nuns," I replied. Her brows were raised as if she had said "indeed," but she said nothing, evidently waiting for me to continue, which I did. "The world that you speak of is a disappointing struggle."

"And you desire to be disappointed without a struggle," she said.

"No; but I desire existence without a continuous fight."

Her eyes went wide open and then half closed. "Things that come to us without a fight are not worth having," she said. "The world's only glory has come out of battle. The Cross was useless till blood was poured upon it."

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"Old Miss Polly also told me about you, and she did not exaggerate."

"What did she tell you?"

"That you were bright, I think."

"Then she exaggerated, or you have thought wrong. Didn't she say that most people considered me airish?"

"Well, yes, I believe she did."

"Dear, erratic old soul; I love her—because she talks all the time and lets me think."

"Then you think best when someone is talking."

"Yes, when some one is talking as Miss Polly does. But I ought not to say that, for a kinder creature never lived."

"Of course you are acquainted with the young woman who lives with her?"

"She comes to my school when she feels disposed, but I can't say that I know her. No one does. She is a whirlwind of frost-tinted leaves, the sunshine that falls into a well, the music of a hound at the dead of night."

"I was going to ask you to tell me about her," I said, gazing in admiration; "but now I must beg you to tell me of yourself."

"Fickle," she laughed. "Is your interest so soon set aside?"

"It was not set aside—it was driven off with a lash of flames."

"I wonder that you did not remain in the world to subdue it with flattery," she said. "But I can't tell you Lady's story; I don't know it well enough. But she is a wonderful girl, and will be a deep

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study for you when you come to—not know her, but to meet her often."

"And *you* are already a deep study, though I have just met you. Were you born in this neighborhood?"

"Yes; in the old tavern over on the big road."

"And educated here?"

"No; at a boarding-school in Gallatin."

"And your parents are dead?"

"Yes—I am all."

"They must have favored cultivation."

"They could neither read nor write. My father was a teamster, my mother a laundress, and my first recollection was carrying dishes to the table in the old tavern."

"Minerva feeding the pigs," I said.

"Yes," remarked Mrs. Radshaw, framing herself in the door; "but he'll be here soon, he hasn't many to feed. Oh, you are acquainted already, are you? Well, it doesn't take people long to get acquainted here. I wonder why Glich don't come on home. It does seem that he never knows when to get back when he goes away, keeping a body worrying about him all the while."

"Do sit down," said Miss Silvester. "He has been away a thousand times and he always comes home, yet you worry over him as if he'd never been away before. Sit down."

She sat down and fanned herself with her apron.

"I reckon your school is increasing now that the cool weather is coming on," she said, turning to Miss Silvester, and continuing to fan herself.

"Yes; when there is nothing else to do the boys

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come to school. And the big boys are troublesome; they are either unruly or want to make love to me. They are full of sentiment."

"Sentiment comes down in the air from the hills," I remarked. "Who could live here without being a poet?"

"I wish you could see some of the verses the boys write," said the teacher. "The first thing after learning to scrawl is a love rhyme."

"There is Luke," Mrs. Radshaw spoke up, getting out of her great rocking-chair. "Come out to supper."

The kitchen was a short distance from the main house, and was connected with it by a covered walk. Luke stood near the kitchen door, washing his hands. He spoke to Miss Silvester, and as he reached up to take down a towel from a nail he gave me a significant look—to note the impression which the young woman had made upon me, I thought. At the table Miss Silvester amused us with satirical comments upon her life as a teacher, and old Luke's eyes cut many a mischievous caper, but the old woman sat in silence, with her ear turned toward the door, listening for the coming of her son. A wind had arisen with the close of the day, and the cows were lowing. We heard the lonesome creak of a barn door.

"That must be Glich," said Mrs. Radshaw.

"Don't worry about him," Luke replied.

"Oh, I'm not worrying, but I was afraid he might have got into some sort of trouble. It seems that

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he always does when he stays out late. You know what I mean."

"Yes, I think I do. And if he doesn't know how to take care of himself by this time, why there's mighty little hope for him. Doctor, after supper we'll go down and see Hatch. I think the two of us can soon bring about a trade."

"I suppose you went to the little office the first place?" said the teacher.

"No," I replied, "I have not been near it. I want to see it first by fire-light, and I could wish that it were raining."

She laughed, with her marvelous eyes full upon me. "I suppose you, too, will soon send in a bundle of your rhymes."

"I don't think I should attempt to requite you with a mere rhyme when you inspire poetry," I replied, weak enough to be pleased with the remark. And now her eyes were not so wide open. She gave me a narrow look.

"Even out in the woods one may read magazines and papers," she said, "and human nature, it has been declared, is very much the same the world over. The little boys at school try to flatter me."

"Doctor," Luke spoke up, "I think she's rather got the upper hand of you."

"That must be Glich," said the old woman. The sound which she had caught was the bray of a distant mule, and, not interested in Glich, and especially not soothed by the frequent interruptions on his account, I was willing to agree that it must be the young fellow, and I was near enough to Miss

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Silvester to drop a word, and her quick mind snatched it, and she leaned back with a laugh. The old man, too, sat in the light of the joke, and he laughed, but the old woman, in the dark, looked up in some surprise.

"I don't see what there is so funny about it," she said. "But, of course, you have to shout at nothing," she added, looking at Luke and with her reproachful eyes throwing the blame on him.

"Why, bless me, I haven't done a thing," he declared, wiping his yes. "Got a crumb of bread down my throat the wrong way, and had to cough. Don't expect a man to sit here and not cough when a bread crumb is—is after him, do you?"

I ought to have felt ashamed of myself, but the young woman's merriment was sweet to my selfish soul, and I could not regret having been the promoter of it. But at the same time I sympathized with the mother's distress, and in attempted atonement I said to her:

"Madam, if you will permit me, I will go in search of your son."

"Oh, no," she replied, looking kindly upon me. "I am a thousand times obliged to you, but I couldn't permit such a thing. He'll come home all right."

"Why, of course," said Luke. "He always has, and why shouldn't he this time? Don't be worried, mother. Why, the prayers of as good a woman as you are could pull a man out of the jaws of death. They never fail but in one case—but we won't talk about that. No," he added, getting up, "we won't talk about that."

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His face now wore a hardened look, and he stood gazing over us at the opposite wall. His wife got up and took him by the hand. "There now," she said, "don't think about it, for it will all come right one of these days. Keep your faith resting with the Lord, and I know it will not be in vain. Come, now, it's time for you and the doctor to go down to the office."

"So it is," he agreed. "Come, doctor."

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CHAPTER VI.

A GIRL'S HISTORY.

We went out into the dark, the old man leading the way, and I following close, wondering what it was that could have disturbed him so. He was silent, walking fast, till the playful dog ran up to him. "Happy fellow," he said, and I heard him patting the dog. "You've got nothing to dread. Go on and lie down." His spirits soon returned, for he laughed when he trod into a depression filled with drifted leaves. "Every season sets its traps for men," he said.

A light shone from the office window. The big gate opened as we drew near. Some one rode through and with a switch lashed the door of the office, and a man's voice commanded the doctor's attention. The door was opened; the doctor stood in an out-pour of light. I heard the crackle of a fire.

"If it's not so very serious I'll come as soon as I can conveniently get there," the doctor said, and the man rode away. With open-handedness the physician invited us to enter the precincts of his art. He had been sitting in the fire-light, but to throw the radiance of hospitality upon his visitors he lighted a lamp and placed it upon the black-smoked mantel-piece. I looked about the room, my heart in the past. The walls had once been white with hard

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plaster, but now they were dark with many a soiling mark of time. In one corner was a bed, and near it a case of books. The carpet was worn through in places. The brick hearth was sunken and cracked. The doctor's eyes followed my own about the room. He and Luke were talking on the prospects of cooler weather. On a chair whose arms had been nicked by the knife of many a nervous caller I sat and mused, but the doctor soon jostled me with a reminder that I was there for business.

"As I told you this morning," said he, "I have been thinking of going back to my old neighborhood. I don't know that I've got much to sell, but we can soon get at what there is."

There was indeed not much and we soon got at it. I had money enough to cover his demand and was not disposed to haggle with him. I was to take the office, the furnishings and the out-lying districts of probable disease. Luke would send my hired horse back to town.

"And," said he, pleased that the doctor and I had so readily come to terms, "if you don't feel able to buy a horse right now, I'll let you have one till you are able."

Thus the last kink was smoothed out. The trade was closed.

"And now, gentlemen," said the doctor, "I have to go away over on the ridge, and as it's a long distance I'll not be back to-night. As you are in your own office, Dr. Hudley, it is not worth while for me to tell you to make yourself at home."

On a table were cob pipes and a box of tobacco,

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and Luke and I sat there, smoking. My mind flew away to the sharp air of the West, with its dazzling light and nervous eagerness, and I felt that I would rather live in this quiet place, among leaves and mosses, than to be an ore-millionaire in the mountains. I do not pretend to say that this feeling did not come from a lack of energy. I will not argue that in not being progressive I was not nationally American. But to me the word happiness is not the synonymic bedfellow of progress. I know that it is man's fond weakness to turn an eye full of love upon the past, and I know that much of the past was narrow-minded and cruel, but I also know that there was gallantry in knee breeches, and an atmosphere that promotes gallantry breeds a gentle pride in self, and that gentle pride inspires generosity.

"You'll have a free swing here," said Luke, gazing with me into the fire. "And a man can't do much unless his swing is free. Yes, we must swing free to make the most of our visit here upon earth. If a man reaches this conclusion early in life, so much the better for him. Therefore, I say, let us be just as happy as we can. I wouldn't counsel a man not to have ambitions, no more than I would tell him not to sit on a log and dream, but there is always a ruffian standing behind a tree in the dark, with club lifted, on tip-toe, to knock an ambition on the head. Ambition is a drunkenness, but man is noblest when he is fired by another sort of intoxication—when he forgets himself in his love for some other human being."

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"He may be noblest, but not always the happiest," I said; and he withdrew his gaze from the fire and looked at me, our eyes meeting.

"That's true, but perhaps it isn't intended that the noblest shall always be the happiest. I guess, however," he added, "that this sort of talk must be stupid to you. I am told that out in the world they have stopped discussing such things. And I hear that in the big towns there is no longer any religion among the people, only a sort of morality that demands of a man to keep himself physically clean. But in this part of the country they still believe in the simple story of Christ. Salvation came with John out of the wilderness, and I guess the woods is its natural home. Along with my other ambitions it was once my hope to preach, and I went about among the neighbors and gathered up godly books and brought them home—armfuls of fodder for a hungry soul."

"Why didn't you preach?"

He got up quickly and stood with his back to the fire, his face dark in the shadow. "When I had fed, I found that my mind was full, but that my soul was still hungry. And there was nothing for it to eat. The truth is, I could not feel that I had religion as Bunyan at last found it."

I saw the hens under the lilac bushes in the garden, I saw myself, a child, with my eyes strained upon a summer's sky, dreading to see the handwriting of fire. How intense had been the psychic wave that had swept over our land just before there

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came the wave of fire with bayonets tossed upon its crest. I let the old man proceed.

"I prayed, and my prayers hung in the low air above me. It was old Adam, the flesh, striving to escape punishment, and—but we'll not talk about it."

He sat down, with his gaze fixed upon the crackling fire. In him there was a strange melancholy. When he spoke of his political disappointments his full eyes had laughed, but in his church disappointment there was more than the tip-toing ruffian, standing in the dark behind the tree. His type could be found nowhere save among the hills of a fervent land. A glare of science might sun-flame a hall till the daylight without were but a sister illumination; each year might startle the world with a great discovery, but this type of man did not see a new light. With one eye on the gospel of the wilderness and the other on his soul in the woods, he remained the same. But on the edges of his domain the trees are falling; the axe rings nearer and nearer; and the strong-armed cutters shout as the timber falls—they are building bridges for the army of progress. Soon he will look at his neighbor and they will be made to feel ashamed of their ignorance of the world, and, cowed, they will sneak out of the blinding light to die in the dark, and the world will move on. But let us sit with this old man while yet he is in a light that does not blind him, and let us listen to his talk, for in him lives the spirit of our fathers.

"How old is Lady Edwards?" I asked, my mind flitting back to her.

"Well," he answered, reaching over and putting

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his pipe on the table, "I hardly know, but I should think she's about grown."

"Miss Silvester thinks she's a genius, not to be understood," I remarked.

"I don't know about that. But she's strange—I guess that's the most of her genius. She's a good deal insane, though gradually she's getting better, and we are mighty apt to believe that there's great wisdom mixed up in a mind we can't understand. Let a preacher mystify us and we cry, inspired. But we won't talk about that. I'll tell you about Lady Edwards. Her father was a man of standing. He built a turnpike under contract and it was thought he got a good deal of money for the work, and about this time he died of pneumonia. His house stood about three miles from here, close to the bank of the creek. Well, not a great while after the death of Edwards, his wife awoke one night, it was supposed, and found a man standing at the side of her bed. She screamed, very likely, and the wretch stabbed her. The little girl was in the same bed, and she jumped up with her mother's blood spurting over her. The murderer lunged at her, but she was over against the wall and before he could reach her she broke through a window, out into the yard. He plunged after her, it is said by some one passing, but must have had some trouble in getting through, for she got quite a start of him. She ran screaming to the creek and jumped off a high bluff into the water. He didn't jump after her, thinking, of course, she'd be drowned and thereby save him the trouble of cutting her throat to keep her

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from recognizing him in case he was caught up. The shrieking of the child had attracted the attention of a man who was passing. He saw her white gown flutter as she jumped from the bluff—he saw the man, scrambling back from the bluff, for he was about to grab her as she jumped—and down the bank the rescuer ran and plunged into the water and saved the child. She was nearly dead when he got her out. He took her in his arms to the buggy where he had left his wife. He wrapped her in a blanket and drove home with her. She was so frightened that she could scarcely tell anything; bits at a time as her frightened mind flitted back and forth, and it was some time before she could make her hearers understand that her mother had been murdered—she would fall back in horror from the sight and scream till she would go into a faint. The alarm was spread and the neighbors gathered. They found the woman murdered—a wooden safe, studded with nails, in which it was supposed the money was kept, was open and the papers were scattered about. All night and all the next day the men hunted in the woods and along all the roads, but could find no trace of the murderer. The sheriff and his deputies came and remained about here a long time. One man, a stranger, was arrested, but he was too small to answer for the man who had chased the child, and was turned loose. The murderer has never been found."

"But the man who saved the child—who was he?" The old man touched his breast. "My wife and I were coming from over on the big road, in a buggy;

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that's how we came to be there. Yes, we kept the poor little thing till old Miss Polly was determined to have her—claimed kin in order to get her. Yes, it was an awful thing. For a long time the child scarcely had any mind at all—she had been known as the brightest girl in the neighborhood, about nine years old. One night she broke the window glass, got out of the room and was running toward the creek when we saw her. Sometimes I'd find her at night, asleep, trembling as if she had a chill. Many a night I have wrapped her up in a blanket and sat in front of the fire with her. But old Miss Polly had to have her, and as she was a woman, and especially as she claimed kin, I couldn't say much, but if she had been a man she would have got the worst thrashing a human ever got. Either that or she would have let me keep that child. At times we'd think she was going to get her mind all back again. She would sing to her doll. But a change would come on of a sudden, and then we'd fear that she was to be less than half-witted all her life. Poor little thing. Once she slipped out, at a time when her mind had seemed sound, and went over to her old home, standing empty, and she set fire to the house and burnt it to the ground. And she said to me: 'Every time they build a house there I will burn it down.' Sometimes at school she makes everybody laugh, and sometimes she makes them all cry. We can see a gradual improvement in her, though the doctors who have examined her from time to time have said that we needn't expect any too much of her; that with her it was all chance.

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She reads a great deal; and they used to take the light away from her at night, afraid that she would set the house on fire, but they haven't any such a fear now, though she still says that if any one builds a house on the old place she will burn it down. It's strange, for she don't remember the murder of her mother. She can learn anything but mathematics, and she hates figures so that they sometimes have to lock up the arithmetics at school to keep her from tearing out the multiplication tables. She says the most unexpected things and is very positive in her likes and dislikes. One time at a school exhibition she threw her book aside—she was to read a story—and startled everybody with a story of her own. And I never could see why—pardon me if I jar you—I never could see why that beautiful mind should be blasted. I know it's not right to question—but we'll let it drop right here. She thinks a great deal of old Miss Polly, for she is a grateful soul, but I like to believe she loves me best—can't help it—for we never had a girl and the cold nights when I sat in front of the fire with her, wrapped in a blanket, listening to the sleet, was happiness for me. Well, I'm glad everything has turned out as we hoped, and to-morrow I'll have the bay mare set aside for you. Suppose we put out the man's light, cover up his fire and go to the house.''

"The doctor said he wouldn't be back to-night and I believe I'll sleep here."

"All right, do just as you like—free swing, you understand.''

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For a few moments he stood in the door, with a weather-hunting look turned upon the sky. "It's as clear as a bell, and the stars look frosty. We have breakfast just about daylight, if not a little before, but we'll send somebody to wake you up. It won't take you long to get used to our ways. Yes, sir, there's frost in the stars. Good-night."

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CHAPTER VII.

CAME TO INVESTIGATE.

When left alone I went out to walk in the dark, with the feeling that a snug fire was waiting for my return. On the gradual slope between the farm-house and the road there were great trees, oak, walnut, and the yellow poplar whose boughs swept the sky of my early boyhood. I called upon these old friends, and leaning against them, almost let myself believe that I could hear the beating of their hearts; and in this world there are harder hearts than hearts of oak, for through the oaken heart there flows a gentle sap that tips with velvet buds the first winter-stiffened twigs.

Again in front of the fire, the door closed, the night shut out, I gave the old book-case an inquiring look, as if expecting encouragement to brush dust from a neglected volume and to open at some dog-eared place marking symptoms and treatment. I shook my head, and gave myself to the fire, the literature not of class, the stilted wording of the pedant, but the romance of all the world, of all tongues, and of all time. And I mused, and what a pleasure it was to be there—not a delight, for that would imply a nerve-dance; it was a pleasure without nerves. But did I care to have this half hypnotic indolence disturbed by a lash upon the

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door and a summons to administer upon the physical estate of a man seized by the cold clutches of colic? Perhaps the desire thus to dream would soon pass away; doubtless it might go with the first change in the condition of the liver, transported from the mountains. And if dreaming did not go; if I should continue to sit with my head in the lap of the past, a stiff-jointed present—starvation—would soon come to blow a cold breath upon my fire. I would summon energy. But I must muse for a time, a heart's holiday. There was so much to think of, not alone of that past which I could not grasp, but a present, new with many an interest—the teacher, Luke, the poor little girl whose gown had flitted white against the dark wall of night, as she leaped into the water. I could see old Luke sitting in front of his fire, a blanket about a frail and trembling form, a dark head upon his breast.

A sharp rap startled me to my feet. I shouted, "Come in," my heart beating fast, so deep had been my musing. The door opened, and just outside stood a young man almost as tall as the door, his face yellowish in the light of the fire, his eyes intent upon me the moment I fell under his view.

"Come in, sir."

He stepped in. "I am Glich Radshaw," he said, bowing.

"I am glad to see you. Sit down." I grasped his hand hard to make him feel the warmth of a welcome I was uncertain of, not yet ready to give up the luxury of total idleness.

"I've been to town, and didn't get back till just

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now. The folks spoke of your coming, and I thought I'd call to see you."

"I'm glad you came. Won't you have a pipe?"

"I don't care if I do. Thank you." He filled the pipe and lighted it. "Yes, thought I'd come down. Miss Clara along with the rest of them told me about you."

"Miss Clara is Miss Silvester, I suppose?"

"Yes; Clara's her first name. She said a good deal about you, and I thought I'd come down and see—"

"You thought you'd come down and see if there was a likelihood of her forming too strong a liking for me."

His pipe fell to the floor. The burning tobacco flew in a shower about his feet. He stamped upon the fire, caught up the pipe and tossed it upon the table.

"What put that fool notion into your head?"

"The look you gave me when you stood at the door. You were searching for danger spots—attractions—and you complimented me by frowning."

"By George, doctor, I wouldn't like to play poker with you."

"If you did you'd get my money. I'm impulsive and curious."

He took up the pipe, filled it, lighted it. "I don't think there's much use in trying to hide anything from you," he said, his countenance shedding the light of a frank distress. "The fact is, I am in love with her. That's honest enough, isn't it?"

I agreed that it was, and I sat watching him as he

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smoked in short breaths, merely touching his lips with the tip of the pipe-stem. I had been astonished at my own outspokenness, almost brutal, but I had mastered my surprise at the moment of stumbling upon a truth. Perhaps I had been stirred by an almost unconscious desire to establish a mastery over him.

"She's been at our house off and on for more than a year, but it didn't take me long to find out what I thought of her." His pipe was out, but he did not re-light it. "I know all about your family," he went on, "and for a moment or two after I heard you'd come I was glad of it; but pretty soon I began to sniff a fox, and I may like to hunt foxes, but I don't want one held under my nose. You understand, don't you?"

"Yes, it's plain enough. You wouldn't object to me as a friend, but you won't tolerate me as a rival. Is that it?"

"The shoe is a pretty good fit," he said. "Do you think there's any danger? You see, I'm asking you to be as wide open with me as I am with you."

"I can't tell yet."

"Thought you were impulsive?"

"I am, but perhaps not in that way."

"I don't like that word perhaps. It puts me in mind of setting on top of a fence with a loose rail, and not knowing which way the thing might turn. But I don't think you'll find me a bad fellow at heart, even if I am a tough customer when it comes to a showdown."

"Have you spoken to the young woman concern-

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ing the state of your heart?" I asked, unable to suppress a humorous mood.

"I have done more than that. I have nagged at her. She knows she's got me, and she won't give me any satisfaction. Sometimes I think she's all brain and no heart."

"It requires a good deal of brain to protect the heart."

"That's so," he assented, "but we don't want brain enough to cover the heart like cold ashes heaped on a fire."

"They put the ashes on the fire to keep it from going out."

"I guess you are right. I mashed a fellow's mouth about her not long ago. I don't recollect what he said. I have got to that point when I feel things that are said—feel 'em instead of hearing 'em. As I looked back I saw him hunting for his teeth in the road, and the road wan't clean, neither. The old folks guess at what I think of her, and they like her; but they rather had their minds fixed on another girl. You'll see her; as sweet a little body as Nature is in the habit of turning out, even when she feels good toward everybody; but she hasn't brain enough to hold me."

"All heart?" I suggested.

"That's it. I oughtn't to say it, but it's a fact that she's got so much heart she makes a man feel too sure of her—leaves nothing to gamble on. It may distress a fellow, but down in his soul he wants a woman to keep him gambling."

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He was cruelly hitting at an unfortunate truth. For absolute possession of the good the truest man is devoutly thankful; but with his brother of coarser clay to win is thrilling, having won—flat. In this young fellow there were bright qualities of mind, half brought out by an unfinished training. I could believe that he had physical courage, and in that lies a manliness which we all of us admire; I knew also that he was a brother of the coarser clay. And my clay might have been as common as his own; it had not been tested by the fire.

"So you don't know yet, doctor, what you think of her?"

"She's bright; but I don't think I could ever fall in love with a woman on account of her brightness. Since we are confessing, I may state that an over sharp intelligence in woman sometimes cuts me to the quick of resentment. She inspires more of dread than of love. I am not wise, but the wisest of men have skipped brain in their search for heart. After all, what is brain but a cool scheme?"

He sat with his mouth half open, his pipe hanging between his fingers. "You are arguing the cause of the other girl; but the teacher has caught me, and I can't get away from the fact. She threw a rope out of her window, and it wound about me and I can't get it off, and the worst of it is; I don't want to. But I didn't think I'd be setting here to-night talking like this. And I guess I'm going to like you. You've captured the old man, and that's no light matter. He's the best man that ever lived,

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and if there's anything in me that ain't afraid, it comes from him. Away back yonder he said to me: 'Glich, if you ever let a boy whip you, you'll get two. I'll give you the other one.' Yes, sir, I am surprised at all this. I expected to come down here and study you on the sly; but you put your foot on my toe the very first thing and made me cry 'ouch!'"

"You say you believe you'll like me. I hope so. By the way, Miss Silvester told me that she was born in the old tavern over on the big road."

"Yes; and her father was a teamster and her mother washed clothes."

"So she said, but I thought she was joking."

"No, it's a fact."

"Not many educated women speak so openly of such an origin."

"I reckon not. I think she does it as a sort of spite. Her folks came here strangers when the old tavern changed hands. I think they were English. The old man gained everybody's respect, for he'd fight at the drop of a hat. And he was as sharp as a thorn, but he couldn't read. His wife died, and he took to drinking harder than ever, and it wasn't long till they laid him out. Shortly after this the girl went off to school. I don't know how she managed it. And when she came back here she won her way by her independence. Nobody sneered at her; nobody had the nerve. Well, it's getting along toward bedtime."

He shook hands with a warm assurance of good

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will; but at the door he turned for a moment to give me one more searching look. And a closer acquaintance with my features must have been as a balm spread upon his worry, for I heard him whistling as he strode up the slope.

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CHAPTER VIII.

LADY EDWARDS.

I was dreaming deliciously when there came a rattling at the door—a summons to breakfast. Through the window I could see the stars still shining, and down in the glen an owl had stayed to hoot in the changing countenance of the dawn. I made haste to the house, for I wished at the outset to establish a good name by being prompt at table, a great virtue in rural Tennessee, and one which has been known to cover many a real blemish of character. "I don't care what you say about him," many a housewife has been heard to declare, "he never puts us to any trouble at mealtime," and this often atoned for the sin of idleness, or even of drunkenness.

Luke looked up from the head of the table and welcomed me with a broad heartiness. He said as it was Saturday there was no school, and, therefore, no necessity to eat at daylight, except to keep up respect for customs. Miss Silvester hoped for the time when she could lie in bed till noon without feeling that she was a cheat. Mrs. Radshaw looked her disapproval of so flagitious a violation of Nature's law.

"The followers of the Lord were always out of bed early," she said.

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"Yes," Miss Silvester spoke up, "and once they got up so early that at night they fell asleep in the garden and left their Master to watch alone."

Glich's admiration of what he conceived to be the young woman's victory, supported by Scripture, burst forth into a wordless roar, a boiling over of his violent nature; but, feeling that he had shown a want of respect for his mother, he fell to sudden silence and bowed to her. Miss Silvester gave him her eyes, and he colored under their light; but in them I could see no love for him. He was not bad-looking, and he was not ignorant; he was made up of rugged forces, with Nature's strongest liquor in his veins, with a certain sort of pride, and with an over-assessment placed upon his worth. There was no love in the teacher's eyes, but there was a look that commanded him to apologize to his mother, not with a mere bow, but in words. This was not a fancy of my own; he saw it, too, and apologized. Nothing escaped the full eyes of Luke. An enemy could have called him pop-eyed. I remember an old saying among the negroes, borrowed from the white trash: "I could knock his eyes out with a round stick and never touch his head."

The window panes flushed; above a hill the sun came up as if with a jump to see what lay upon the other side, and the lamp on the table lost its luminous flash and stood a skeleton of light.

I loitered in the yard, looking up the slope toward the woods, Miss Silvester and Glich near, Luke at the dining-room door talking to his wife within.

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"Why, yonder comes Lady Edwards," the teacher cried. At that moment I saw a girl come out of the woods, the new light pouring over her. As she approached she wiped the sun-tagle out of her eyes, saw me, and drew back, but Luke's voice commanded her to come on, and she did—a picture. Her fingers were stained with the juice of the wild grape, as if with the ink of the deep woods she had written a poem for the breezes to recite in the tree-tops and in the chimney when the world is dark. She walked with the lightness of May in her feet; her head belonged to autumn. Coming as she did, out of the woods, out through the first light of the fresh sun, I could not catch her features. Mystery induced me to expect much, but I could only generalize upon what I had found. Luke introduced me to her, and with a laugh and a giggled, "Little Mitford," she fled into the sitting-room. She was more mischievous than bashful. About her there was an unconscious boldness, with no mark of conscious timidity. She was dark, with large eyes, intensely black. Her features were regular—her brow beautiful. Her gown was home-woven, blue and red checked; her hair was held back by a trailing bramble, plucked in the woods, the red leaves still upon it. On her mind there were dark spots, I had been told and believed; but there was a wild and thrilling sanity in the decorative touches she had given herself. Nothing could have been more becoming than that briar vine with its weather-dyed leaves. Surely she was not unconscious of her witchery. At first her size eluded me,

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but afterward the picture in my mind presented her as well-rounded and of a pleasing height. I could without tiptoeing have put my chin on her briar-wound head, and I am six feet.

Luke went out to superintend the housing of his corn. Mrs. Radshaw was in a room off the kitchen to see that a negro woman made every motion count in the weaving of a rag carpet. We could hear the measured bumping of the loom. The rest of us held an idle morning's session in the sitting-room, Miss Silvester in complete possession of her slave. He rattled his chains in accompaniment to the rillet of talk.

"Do take off your vine and stay awhile," said the teacher, speaking to Lady Edwards.

"The last time I was here Glich tried to rumple my hair, but if he does it now the briars will stick him," Lady replied.

"A woman's inherent sense of protection," said Miss Silvester, looking at me. And, turning her eyes upon the girl, she added: "I would like to paint a picture of you as I see you now, haw-bush."

"I'll bet you could make a picture if you tried," the slave declared.

She gave him a smile, another rivet in his collar. "I might if I had money and the opportunity for study. There are not many ways open. To work for money means wrinkles and failing sight before the means can be gathered. I might steal it or marry it. Better, however, to steal it, for the marriage veil is the winding sheet of art."

The slave objected, straining at his chains.

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"You fly so high above the timber that my shot can't reach you," he said. "But I don't believe you're right. Of course, I don't know anything about art. But I saw some pictures down at the State Fair, and they were art, I reckon, and the best one was painted by a married woman."

"What was the subject?" she asked.

"A shock of corn and some pumpkins, natural enough to feed to the hogs."

"She did well to choose something without a soul."

"But she had another one, a little girl."

"The picture of herself before the soul was smothered."

"Well, as I said, you are too high above the timber for me."

"I saw a picture as I came this morning," said Lady, twining in her lap her grape-stained fingers. "A dog caught a rabbit and killed it with one big bite. I took it up, and in its eyes was Death as the poor thing saw it, and it was frightful. I looked for a long time, and the picture faded, and then the eyes were dull glass, for Death had gone on to scare something else, an old man or a little child, maybe."

The teacher looked at me, half closing her eyes, and the slave stretched his bull neck, for the collar was hurting him.

I asked the girl why she had not come in to see me when I was at her home. "I didn't think I wanted to see you," she answered. "But if you come again I will see you. I like you."

"That's the way for a woman to talk," Glich

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cried. "Why don't all of 'em come out and say what they mean?"

Miss Silvester answered him: "Lady has a special privilege, but if all women were to be as frank—"

"Well, what then?" he cried.

"What if a woman should? Why, men would flatter themselves and call her a fool," and with a smile at Lady and a nod of her Indian head, she addressed herself to me. She had in view the forging of another chain, I fancied, but I was determined not to blow the bellows to heat the iron.

"Doctor, when you have lived here till the sentiment that surrounded your grandfather, your father, mother, and your own early childhood has faded, you will be glad enough to go back where men are building cities. You will call yourself a failure, and a failure is so bitter that he can taste nothing sweet. Many of the people about here are intelligent enough, but it's musty, the intelligence you find in a last year's newspaper, and it has only a historical bearing upon the present."

"I have found many a sweet and half-forgotten poem in an old newspaper," I replied.

"But when you had it by heart and repeated it over and over again you looked for another poem."

"Perhaps another old one," I said.

"Yes; but sweet old poems once were new, and being new, were none the less sweet; and while you are looking for the old, other men are feasting on the new, to be denied you for many a day. I would like to live on the very crest of the present, to feel

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the instant influence of the new. And in this respect I believe that women in general are more progressive than men. Men hoard old books, but it is rare that you find a woman bibliomaniac."

"And it may be rare, too, that she is a deep poet, a broad historian, or a soul-moving composer."

"Doctor, I would like to say bosh!"

"Then say it."

"I will. Bosh! I won't speak of a soft and polite slavery which indeed has been as cruel as the persecution of the Jewish race. I won't speak of man with his hand on the pliant head of woman, ready to quash her down into the sewing-chair; I won't array myself as the enemy of God-aged institutions; all I will say is—bosh!"

Glich spoke up: "Don't you think you two had better come down and roost on the lower limbs? Why, I can just hear you fluttering away up there. We are all ready to acknowledge that a woman's got sense."

"Indeed?" said the teacher.

"Yes, willing to acknowledge it every day in the week. Why, man hasn't any quarrel to pick with her. She's his mother, his sister and his sweetheart. Of course there are some things she don't know as much about, for they ain't in her line."

"I know some things that some men don't," Lady said. "I know that a dog sweats only on the tongue, and I know that the most of the guinea hens won't lay in a nest again if you put your hand in it."

"There," cried Miss Silvester. "Did you know that, Mr. Glich?"

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"Why, of course. But women don't as a general thing and that's the reason it astonishes you."

Mrs. Radshaw came in, the windows rattling with her tread. Miss Silvester looked at Glich as he brought forward the big armchair.

"Lady, what's Miss Polly doing?" the old woman asked, fanning herself with her apron.

"She was picking a chicken when I left."

"Has she got any carpet rags?"

"She gave them to the store-man for sugar and coffee."

"I'm sorry. I wanted to get them myself. Glich, where did your father go?"

"Out looking after the corn."

"Why don't you go and help him?"

"One can look as well as two. I want to be with the doctor a little while. We want to fix up an acquaintance, you know. They are getting it in all right. Here he comes now."

The old man came in with burs on his rough trousers. He sat down with a smile on his face, looking the picture of good humor and contentment. He told us a story of old Tuck Bethpage, and it reminded me of my call at his house, of his saying that Luke had surely died of having eaten too much persimmon pudding. Luke laughed. It was his custom, he said, to send the fellow a pudding every year. Bethpage was industrious enough to pick up the persimmons from under the trees, but he was too stingy to sweeten them, so he felt himself charitably bound to furnish the sugar. Bethpage was noted for his closeness. He had been well reared

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for his day and generation; had been well schooled, and as he owned negroes he was entitled to call himself a gentleman. But he was a blunt off-set to the accepted gentleman of the South, though throughout the sunny land his type was not rare. The mean Southerner was the meanest man on earth, the head of our household declared himself to believe. He was the meanest because he had least excuse to be mean. He was surrounded by examples of open-heartedness. Every household in the old days was a sanctuary dedicated to hospitality.

"But old Tuck never worshiped that sort of god," said Luke. "He had to make a pretense of bravery, for that was absolutely demanded, but if he had fought a duel he would have been too stingy to put enough powder in his pistol. But he's quite a hand to court the girls," he added with a glance at Miss Silvester and a quick wink at me.

"Go on," said the teacher.

"Well," he went on, "there is a strong draw down this way, and he never sees me that he don't ask how the teacher is getting along. I believe he would stop with his mouth full of his favorite pudding to inquire about her."

"I wish the stuff he eat had killed him," Glich cried out; and his mother looked at him. "Why, my son, I am astonished at you," she said. "What do you mean? A young man with Christian parents talking that way and the doctor not very well acquainted here, either."

I was attracted toward Lady Edwards. Her eyes showed that she was about to speak. "The rabbit

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died and it had not eaten half of what God had given it," she said. "And God thinks as much of the rabbit as he does of old Bethpage."

Mrs. Radshaw turned toward me, and said low of tone: "She says a good many things, doctor, that she don't mean—she ain't right in her mind."

"But she might utter many a truth," I replied.

Luke's lips tightened. "How do we know that God—but we have had enough of this. Lady, my dear, you haven't kissed me."

He held out his hand and she ran to him, May in her feet, and kissed him. He held her hand and she stood with her great eyes of black flame full and child-loving upon him.

"You never will forget me, will you?"

She put her hands on his whitening head. "When the wind is blowing and strange things are crying away out in the dark, I put a blanket around me and sit in the chair by the fire and dream you are rocking me to sleep." She kissed his brow, went slowly to her chair and sat down with her back toward us.

"God bless the poor thing," said the old woman, sadly shaking her head.

Dr. Hatch returned, bade us farewell and rode away to pursue in his old neighborhood the phantom of happiness. And when he had passed out of sight down the road the old man said: "Well, they come and they go, and they don't appear ever to be satisfied till they go the last time."

"It's the Lord's will," replied his wife.

"I don't know about that. It don't seem that the

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Lord has much to do with mapping out a man's journey for him."

"I mean, that it's the Lord's will when they go for the last time," she said, and the old man slowly nodded.

Miss Silvester requested Glich to go to the post-office on an errand for her, and he got up with his clanking implements of slavery heavy upon him. He rode off, a fine cavalry figure, and soon afterward the teacher, Lady and I went down to my office; and we were sitting there when Glich returned, not well pleased. He brought a magazine for the teacher and she borrowed his knife to cut the leaves. Lady stood over her, looking at the pictures. The young man said that he didn't see much to that thing, all pictures and no news. He was out of humor. The horn blew for dinner. He stepped forward with a determination to walk with Miss Silvester. She turned as if to walk with me; his eyes spat anger and she walked with him. I could hear him talk complainingly as we walked toward the house. Lady timed her steps with mine.

"When I was a boy I thought that poplar tree touched the sky," I said, pointing to the tree and looking aslant at her head, still briar-wreathed.

"And I used to think that God couldn't see except at night when the sky was full of his eyes," she replied.

"Do you go to church?" I asked, wondering if her dementia had a religious coloring.

"Sometimes, but I get tired unless the preacher talks about Christ. I love Him, because I know

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Him and can see Him. But I don't know God so well. The Bible says He is awful and that makes me afraid. But Jesus is close to us and His eyes are full of love. I can see His eyes, in the woods, sometimes, and I like to go there to look for them. I ain't afraid of you. See how close I am to you?"

"We'll be great friends, won't we?"

"Yes," she said with gladness in her voice. "I'm not sorry the other doctor went away. I didn't like him much. He was all the time trying to find out what was the matter with me. I know I'm not right. They don't have to keep on telling me. But I don't know what's wrong. I think I must have fallen out of a tree. Sometimes—but I never told the other doctor—sometimes I almost know what is the matter with me—at night. I see a light coming toward me; it is a torch. I can't see who is bringing it; I see only an arm and a hand, stretched out of the dark. But when I reach out my hand to take the torch, so glad it has come, it falls to the ground and goes out, and somebody laughs loud and for days after that I don't know anything—everything is black and they think I'm going to die. I have found out I can't get the torch and I pray that it be kept from me, and it has been a long time since I have seen it coming out of the dark."

At the steps leading up into the passage, Glich and Miss Silvester halted to wait for us. Luke got up from a window out of which he had looked upon our approach and came forward with a smile for Lady.

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"I'm glad to see you take to him," he said to her. "It is a new interest," he added, speaking to me. "And that is good for her. Sometimes she gets acquainted easily and then again she hangs back. It's hit or miss right at the start."

She caught hold of his arm and, swinging, lifted her feet off the ground. "Daddy's stronger than anybody," she said, releasing his arm and adjusting her wreath. "No, it don't take me long to like anybody or not to. I'm like the strange dog you meet in the road. I come up or run away."

In the sitting-room after dinner the slave was inclined to growl at the hardships he was forced to endure. Once when the teacher stood at the window looking out, with a stray tune on her lips, I heard him say, leaning close to her, "Come, now, you make a fish out of me. Don't play me about any longer—you've reeled me till my mouth's sore."

"If the hook hurts you are at liberty to flounce off. A flutter will free you." Her profile was turned toward me, sharp-cut against the window-pane, and I thought that her cruel features were well borne out by this heartless speech.

"But can't you see I don't want to get off? Come, now, don't treat a fellow so hard. Make me some sort of a promise."

"What sort?" she asked, and with her fingers she pecked on the window-pane a time-gallop to the stray tune on her lips.

"A promise that you will marry me."

"When?"

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"Right away. I don't believe in putting things off. We were born—"

"That's true," she broke in.

"For each other."

"Oh," she squeaked like a mouse and resumed her pecking on the window-pane.

"You said you'd like to study art. You'd better study surgery. I guess it would tickle you mightily to saw off the top of a man's head."

"Go over there and sit down, please. I want to look out alone."

"You want to look toward the doctor's office."

"Don't be silly. Sit down, please."

I was conscious of having given one ear to Luke and of nodding confirmations while stealing the talk at the window. Glich sat down and leaned over, muttering. Mrs. Radshaw spoke of her desire to attend church on the following day. Luke asked the name of the preacher and was told that Brother Barnes would conduct the services. Miss Silvester turned from the window.

"Isn't he the man who refused to permit a woman evangelist to preach in his church?" she asked. Mrs. Radshaw answered that he had objected to a woman who had come with simply the assertion that she was a preacher, and with no recommendation as to her character.

The teacher threw up her head with a contemptuous sniff. "No recommendation as to character. And yet they will let any pair of trousers stand in the pulpit, and it makes no difference as to character. Breeches are not excluded even if the slime of the

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gutter is not yet dry upon them, and in fact the more of a craven Mr. Pantaloons acknowledges himself to have been, the more is he an illustration of the goodness of God. Character indeed!"

"But I think a woman's out of place in the pulpit," Mrs. Radshaw quietly remarked.

"But this woman evidently was not," said Miss Silvester. "The newspapers praised her good work."

"A woman's got as much right to preach as a man," Glich blurted out, and the teacher gave him a nod and a smile.

"Thank you," she said, and then continued: "The pulpit was given to man, perhaps; but the first promise of eternal life came through a woman. But what does eternal life amount to in comparison with man's customs and traditions? Barnes preach—a narrow-minded old bigot, that's what he is, and I wouldn't listen to him to save his life. No, I wouldn't. And I don't believe he has any more religion than that dog out there. He did his best to keep me from getting the school—wanted the place for his son, a lazy giant."

"Yes," Glich drawled, "and one day I looked back and saw him hunting for his teeth in the road."

"Hunting for his teeth!" the old lady exclaimed.

"Yes, he got a jolt and they fell out."

"Why I didn't know he had false teeth."

"I didn't either, and I don't think there were any falser than the rest of him; but he looked for 'em in the road and they wouldn't fit after he found 'em."

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Luke began to laugh, his eyes watery with his strong surge of mirth. "Don't you know what he means, mother? His teeth were knocked out."

Slowly turning her broad face she put her son under a questioning look. "Glich, did you hit him?"

"Well, I made a motion and he happened to be in the way."

She bit her lip. "And that's the reason Brother Barnes was so cool toward me the last time we met. I declare to goodness I think sometimes that I have more to put up with than any woman I ever saw; and, doctor, you must feel sorry already that you came to such a neighborhood."

"Madam," I made haste to reply, "I'll never feel sorry for living in a community where a ruffian's teeth are knocked out."

"Good," cried Glich, but fearing Miss Silvester's commanding eye, he conquered his enthusiasm and bowed to his mother. He was silent for a moment and then he added: "I told the doctor about it. The fellow spoke slightingly of someone—"

"Of me," said Miss Silvester.

"Of her, Glich?" Luke asked.

"Yes, of her."

"Then I hope he didn't find his teeth," said the old man, with a laugh.

"Talked slightingly of you, my dear?" the old lady spoke up. "Then I've got nothing more to say except that I glory in my son's manliness. I can't say that I ever did like Brother Barnes. He's always complaining that the folks don't give him enough, and every once in a while he threatens to leave."

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"I did the best I could," said Glich. "I contributed to one member of the family about as hard as I was able."

"Doctor," Luke was moved to say, "I don't know how you feel about it, but I believe that money and the church should be kept as far apart as possible. I always imagine that the devil dances a hornpipe when a preacher clamors for money. A preacher ought to be made easy, you understand; but when he begins to hanker to hear the clink of money, why I put him alongside of any other money-maker. Of course the Gospel needs money, but the Lord was sold for silver and I can't forget that. And, taking it all in all, it strikes me that the devil has more need of money than the Lord has; the devil has to buy legislatures. But let's see if we can't drop the subject. It seems that no matter what we take up the first thing we know here we go dragging it toward the meeting-house. And we'll drop it right here."

The shadows of the trees were stretched long upon the land; the afternoon was striding off on stilts. Lady got up from her silence and said: "I am going home and Little Mitford is going with me."

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CHAPTER IX.

ON A ROCK.

Up the slope and into the woods we strolled, silent for the most part, a word and a sentence now and then. No one had appeared surprised at her saying that I was to go with her. At parting she had lifted the corners of her red cape and touched Luke's arms with them, and then she had kissed him, and her lips were as red as the cape; she had shaken them all good-by and had taken me by the hand to lead me forth from the room, trusting creature. She was a child except when some strange thought, too odd or too bold for the maidenly-sane, shot out of her mind. She remembered scraps of what she had read, bits of bright color; she loved the strong words of poetry, blank verse, that Miss Silvester had given her.

We trod a narrow path through the woods, she in front, her light feet pattering on the leaves. "I used to come through these woods by myself at night, but I won't do it again," she said. "It was dark one night and just as I got near the bluff on the creek I saw the torch coming toward me. I was afraid and wanted to run, but the light seemed so easy that I thought I could get it this time; but when I reached out and tried to snatch it, it fell off the bluff into the creek—and I couldn't see through the

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darkness. I don't know how I got home. I was in bed three days." She stopped and turned about, the fading light of the sun on her face. "If I am with you sometime I will try again to get it, and if it falls you will grab it up for me, won't you?"

"Yes, and if I can't get it I can take you home, for it may not be dark for both of us."

She laughed, touched my breast playfully, and her feet pattered again on the leaves in the path.

"Do you love Miss Silvester?" she asked.

"I like her."

"But that isn't love, is it? I don't know what love is, only I love Christ and Luke and Miss Polly, Mammy Polly I call her. And I may love you after a while. Will you care?"

"It would make me happy," I said.

"Then I think I will after a while. Sometimes Luke don't think that God loves him, and then he's awful sorry. And in the night Mother Radshaw gets up and prays for him. One time I heard him say, ' Why don't the Lord give it to me?' "

"Give him what?" I asked.

"Something he prayed for, love of the Lord, I think. It used to scare me, for I didn't know but the old Bad Man was after Luke, and once I called the Bad Man wicked and I told him that if he took Luke he would have to take me too, for I loved him. One time Luke had a fight and he prayed and prayed for the blood to go off his hands, for he couldn't get it off with water. Mother Radshaw prayed with him, and he had his hands on a chair and they bent over the chair and shut their eyes

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because they didn't want to see the blood on his hands. Maybe there wasn't any blood, but I thought there was. Well, they prayed till the blood was all off, and then Luke was so happy that he sang all the next day. When he believes that the Lord loves him he's full of fun, and he makes us all laugh, but he is awful low down when he thinks the Lord don't love him. Glich loves Miss Silvester."

"How do you know?"

"I can see. But she don't love him, and sometimes it makes him sad, but he don't pray—it makes him cuss terrible, and I heard him one day out by the stable and I told him the Bad Man would get him, and he said the old scoundrel already had him, he believed. I asked Miss Silvester why she didn't love him to keep him from swearing, and she said she wasn't an evangelist. Do evangelists love men to keep them from cussin'?"

"Yes; some of them put their arms about the evil in the world and try to hug it into being good."

"Do they? Tell me some more."

"Evil stands throwing stones. The evangelist takes the stone out of Evil's hand and slips a flower in its place."

"Oh, I like that," she cried, looking back. Her heart was hungry for images. In her strange world of crimson glimpses, a dull-colored fact was a lifeless intrusion. To me she presented the vision of a poem, rich in rudeness, so full that its wild juices could not be properly diluted by the meager art of the craftsman. She glanced back at me and her

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eyes threw a warmth upon my heart. Onward she led me, the path widening. Here was a great, hollow tree, and off there a hole under a rock, the habitation of a fox, the spirit of the woodland's midnight mischief. She pointed to the den with a shake of her black hair, iridescent creature, flashing the many-hued lights of a disease-colored mind. What must have been her most secret musings? What shapes came to dance in the dusk that lay about the threshold of her understanding? Of all the creatures I had known this woman-child was the most interesting. She was a romance with no promise that the plot would be revealed. To me she granted a delightful freedom. I could think aloud, vague fancies; and from her would come no cool estimation, no critic's stare. The sternly practical have termed imagination a disease, a branch of mistletoe marking the unsoundness of the tree; and with her I could indulge the whims of this disease. Once I found a forgotten grave deep in a roadless woods, and of perfect rest it was the only picture I had ever seen; it was sublimer than a monument. I thought of that grave as we strode along, and I described it to her, lying so far away from the track-making feet of man. The path leading down to the creek was broad and she was walking beside me, her hand resting on my arm.

"And did nobody know who was sleeping there?" she asked.

"No one could tell me."

"But God will not forget," she said. "When the time comes for all the people that ever lived to get

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up and wash their faces to sit down to breakfast with the Lord, the ones that are sleeping away off yonder may be woke up first so they can get there in time."

"And the poor wretch who all his life had to wait for the second or even the third table may then eat first," I said, and she clutched my arm.

"Red birds come from the sun and white pigeons fly down from the moon!" she cried, her eyes following the flight of a bird. She had dismissed all thought of the lone grave and the breakfast table of the resurrection.

"And the bat; where does it come from?"

"From the black cloud that makes the chickens go to roost long before night. A long time ago I found a bird's nest in a bush, and there were two speckled eggs in it and—but you mustn't look cross at me, for it was a long time ago—I took 'em and the poor bird came to my window and pecked on the glass. I took the eggs back, but the poor thing wouldn't have them—a negro woman said the bird was afraid I'd hoodooed 'em. I grieved over what a bad thing I'd done, and I couldn't sleep, and for a long time after that I lay in bed and all the time the poor bird was pecking at the window. I begged Mammy Polly to bring the poor thing in out of the rain, but she said there wan't any bird pecking there, but I know there was, don't you?"

"Yes, and it had come to tell you not to feel sorry about the eggs, for she had tested them and found them all right."

"Oh, Little Mitford, you know so much; and I'm

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so glad you do. You don't care if I call you Little Mitford, do you?"

"It made me feel ashamed at first, but I don't mind it now."

"Because you know everybody lets me say what I please. And I hear 'em talking about it, and they think I don't understand 'em, but I do."

We were now upon the gravelly margin of the creek. It was a changeful stream, of blabbing shallows and deep, quiescent pools. "This is Caney Fork," she said. "See that bluff away up yonder? I am nearly always afraid to go there—I want to jump off. Sometimes I almost believe that I have jumped off there, a long time ago when I wasn't a girl, but something else. And I know that if I'd go there at night the torch would be sure to come. Let us get a drink. You drink, too."

On a rock we knelt and drank, our heads touching.

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CHAPTER X.

A FORLORN VISITOR.

The sun was down before we reached Miss Polly's house, but the woods were still pink with the glow in the west. The old woman stood in the hall door, and upon seeing us she gave a cry of surprise and fled into the sitting-room to make her welcome more orderly.

"Oh, I knowed in reason you'd soon be over to see us, for your father has slept in this house many a time, and the carryings on him and my husband used to have. Law me! But you must excuse the looks of everything. I couldn't get the spinnin' wheel out in time, so I had to shove it up there in the corner. I brought it in here to spin by the fire, for the cool air makes the wool act so contrairy. Do sit down, please. Lady, for gracious sake, don't laugh that way right here in the doctor's face. Oh, you laugh because you're glad he's here. Well then, laugh all you want to, my child. It won't hurt you. I was ridin' along the other day with a basket of aigs, and the aigs began to drop through a split in the bottom of the basket and squesh on the ground, and a man standin' near the road jest flung up his hands an' haw-hawed. And I said to him, 'Jedgin' by yo' looks you ain't used to laughin' much, so I 'low I have done you a power of good,

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wuth all the aigs it has cost. Jest keep on laughin' an' yo' folks will be glad to see you when you go home.' Yes, sir. How's all the folks over at Radshaw's? I've been trying to get over there for a week, but I've been so busy I couldn't stir off the place. Two of my old geese have took up the notion to set, the fetch-taked things, and it has kept me prancin' around tryin' to make them behave themselves. Bless you, they haven't got an aig. One of 'em is a settin' on a rock an' the other on a door-knob. I do believe they've gone crazy. And one of the hens took up the notion to do the same thing, and I reasoned with her, I did, but she wouldn't pay no attention, so early this mornin' I chopped her head off and let her set in the stove. Nuther chickens nur geese have got half the sense they used to have. Well, well, and to think you've come back here to live. It do beat all how folks come back, but I don't blame 'em, for I reckon you'd have to travel a mighty long time before you'd find the beatin's of old Sumner County. They tell it on Major Hardy that when he come to die he said he didn't mind dyin', for that was all tomfoolery anyway, but he didn't want to leave old Sumner. Let us poke up the fire, for I know you must be cold. Dear me, the wood ain't no account these days. What are they doin' over at Radshaw's?"

"Luke is laughing once in a while, but he is getting it into his head that the Lord don't care much for him, and Glich is ready to cuss because the teacher don't love him," Lady informed her.

"Well, well, did you ever. Luke is the strangest

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mortal for a smart man I ever seen in my life. It do seem like smart folks are so beset with trouble. And Glich is mad because the teacher don't love him," she blazed up. "Did anybody ever! Why, how can she love him if she can't? But why ought she to love him, I'd like to know? Always a scoutin' round the neighborhood, a knockin' out teeth in the road. Oh, I heard all about it. They don't keep much from me, I tell you. Lady, I jest know your feet are wet. Put 'em out there. Now I'll go and get a bite to eat, such as it is."

I declared that Luke expected me at supper.

"What!" she cried, with a shovel in her hand, stooping to thrust it into the fire but twisting about to look up at me. "You'll not budge out of this house till you've had your supper. Expect you, indeed. And I am to have the name of sendin' folks away from my house hungry. Laws a massy! That may be the way in the outlandish places where you have lived, Dr. Hudley, but I'll give you to understand it's not the way here. You just set right where you are till I call you, sir."

She flounced out of the room with a brand on her shovel, smoke curling about her head like a great wisp of hair. Lady took down her school books, and standing beside my chair pointed out her lessons. "I like to read this one," she said, putting her finger on the "Dream of Clarence." "The first time I read it I could see the jewels in the dead men's skulls—see, right here, 'in scorn of eyes.' I thought about it a long time after I went to bed, and I raised up and peeped through the window,

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and out in the yard low down in the grass there were lightning bugs and they seemed like jewels looking about for dead men's skulls. And here's another one I like—'I had a dream which was not all a dream.' I wish I had a book full of things like that."

"Do you ever like funny things?" I asked, knowing that an appreciation of humor might sometimes be accepted as a promise of a returning sanity.

"Oh, yes, a piece in another book where a man stole a pound of butter and slipped it into his hat and had to sit by a red-hot stove."

Miss Polly appeared at the door. "Lady, run down to the spring house and bring the cream."

I said that I would go, starting up. "What, you'll go!" she cried. "You'll do nothin' of the sort. A nice thing to get out over the neighborhood, a visitor at my house and a doctor at that, havin' to trot down to the spring house for cream. You jest set right where you are, sir."

Supper passed under the drifting shadows of fragmental apology. Miss Polly drew an inference that my mind was set upon an early leave-taking, and forthwith she proceeded to raise a persuasion for a longer stay. "We haven't got a lantern and you mustn't think of goin' through the woods while it's so dark. You must wait till the moon rises, and it won't be long. Lady, I want to talk to the doctor on business, so you go to your room, please."

"Let me stay, Mammy Polly. I can't understand the business."

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"But I'm afraid you might try to and that would bother you. Go to your room, please."

Without another word, except to bid me good-night, she went out. The old woman waited till she heard the closing of a door and then she said: "You don't know how glad I am that she takes to you. I told her that she must like you. But for that matter I told her that she must like Dr. Hatch, but it didn't do any good. I want you to see if you can't help her. It seems mighty strange to me that nothin' has been done. Poor thing, she has been left to fight it out by herself. Sometimes she's nearly all right, and then I think she's the smartest thing that ever was. She's got several—what do you call 'em?"

"Moods," I suggested.

"Yes, sometimes I think she's got three or four. Now she's in what you might call her middle mood, and the next one may be her best or worst, we never can tell. In one of her moods she is a child, just as she used to be, and then she plays with a rag doll. Luke told you about her, didn't he? I knew he would," she added when I had nodded. "Then her name is Barbara, her real name. After she got back part of her mind she made us call her Lady, and she won't let us call her anything else, except when she plays with her doll; and then we have to call her Barbara. Do you know all about insanity?"

"I know very little about it except in a general way, but I am going to make a special study of her case."

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"Just like your father, for all the world. And I do believe you can do her a power of good. Dr. Hatch wanted to have her taken to an asylum, but she fought against it, and I don't blame her, poor thing, to be sent away off there among strangers. Isn't she the puttyest creature you ever saw?"

"She is beautiful."

"Your father over and over again," she said, rocking herself. "And I want you to come and go just as you see fit. I want you to see her in all her —what did you call 'em?"

"Moods."

"Yes, of course. I don't know why I can't ricollect such a plain word. But law me, it's so easy to forget a thing these days. Folks can't ricollect half as well as they used to. Moods, why of course. There's something mighty strange about a torch—did she tell you about it? I don't reckon she did, for she's close about it."

"Yes, she told me."

"Then she must have a good deal of confidence in you. But you'll see her in all her moods. I don't know how I ever did get along without that word. Just like your father, always givin' out something that folks need. Luke sold her farm and put the money out at interest for her—three thousand dollars, I understand. And he's in one of his moods. Before, gracious, I never knowd before what to call it. You've put a new light on everything. Yes, he has 'em too. He's been tryin' all his life to get religion, but somehow he can't, no matter how hard he works for it. Sometimes his wife prays for him

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nearly all night, and she's about the best hand to pray we've got, man or woman. He goes up to the mourners' bench and begs for the speret, but somehow it won't come. One time we all thought it had. He jumped up and went home happy; but the very next day he knocked old Dan Mopery down and walked all over him, and Dan was a professor of the faith. Then Glich with his fetch-taked race horse talk said it was 'all off' between his dad and the Lord. But we all know that there never was a better man than Luke; that is, if you don't try to run over him. And I hold that the Lord didn't make one man for another man to run over. Why, law me, many a time I've got up at night to wash the blood off my husband's head. He just had to fight. It would come on him like a spree, and he didn't pray for pardon when he whupped a man, nuther. Laws a massy, he'd 'a' come nearer prayin' for the sight of another one that needed whuppin'. Now there's Bethpage, a big man in the church, but I lay the Lord will never get any of his money except by givin' a mortgage. Oh, I know it's wrong to talk this way, but I can't help it. And you won't hear me prayin' for mussy, nuther. When old Polly's time comes she'll say, 'Good-by, folks,' and that will be the end of it."

Through the window I saw the light shimmering on the hillside.

"The moon is up," I said, arising to take my leave. She urged me to pass the night there, offering as an inducement the room her husband had died in, but I pleaded a necessity for going, and she yielded.

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Putting a shawl over her head she went with me into the yard. At the gate she kept me standing to tell me of the trouble she was having with her senseless geese, and then she let me go out into the shadowy moonlight. The leaves on the ground were sprinkled with a diamond dust of frost. The dead grass by the pathway was a silver fringe. From a mysterious darkness came the gruff and echoless hoot of an owl. The double-tufted monster laughed to think that the cricket and the katydid, the night-fly, the tree-toad, all were hushed by the chill air. He sat enthroned a barbarian monarch of a kingdom of silence, his to rule over and to violate.

At the creek I halted and stood upon the rock whereon the girl and I had knelt to touch the water with our lips. I knelt again, and drinking, gazed into the softly murmuring flow, now a thousand fathoms deep with a star-studded bottom. I crossed the stream, stepping from rock to rock, pausing anon to catch the melody beneath my feet.

In Luke's sitting-room a light was burning, and as I drew near, I heard the old woman's voice deep in prayer. The friendly dog came silently out as if warning me not to make a noise. I passed the house on tiptoe and the dog turned back. In my office a fire had been lighted. I did not sit down to dream; I searched among my books in the hope of finding a work on insanity. There was none. I turned toward the fire, now to muse. There came a light tap at the door. The summons was so timid that I did not call "Come in." I opened the door easily as if in gentle comport with the bird-like tap.

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And there stood a girl with a dark mantle over her head. I invited her in. She stepped forward shrinkingly. She sat down as if cowed, and it was some time before she looked at me, and when she did, her blue eyes asked for pity.

"I was here before, but you hadn't come back," she said.

"Did you go to the house?" I inquired.

Her eyes lost their appeal for pity. "No," she said. "I wouldn't go there. *She's* there."

This outbreak seemed to frighten her. I waited for her to proceed. "But you don't know what I mean."

"But you can tell me."

She looked toward the door. "I am afraid somebody might come. Do you expect anybody?"

"No. You may talk freely. What can I do for you?"

"An old woman told me that you could help me. She said doctors know everything. I think that, too, and I would have come to Dr. Hatch but mother owed him and I was afraid. The old woman said that doctors don't tell secrets that are told to them. Must I give my name?"

"Not necessarily."

"But I will. My name is Mattie Boyce. You've heard of me, haven't you?"

"No, I can't say that I have."

Her face flushed with anger. "Then they don't even speak of me. But *she* does, I know. But I haven't told you. Glich and I were engaged till that

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woman came with her airs and her big words. I wish she was dead."

"But what can I do for you?"

"I want you to give some powders?"

"What sort of powders?"

"Love powders. I want to give them to Glich, some way, and when he takes them he will love me again. Will you?"

She looked up and pity was again in her eyes. "Little girl," I said, for she was a child deluded by the ignorance of an old woman, "there are no powders that can call back a love from its heartless flight."

Her hands were in her lap and now they tightly closed, one over the other. My words smote her and she seemed to feel that her heart had found a sympathizer if not a physician.

"There's nothing to bring it back?"

"Nothing. But it may return when tired of its wild flight."

Her eyes beamed upon me. "He used to love me and as big and strong as he is, he'd sit all day if I'd sing to him. I have loved him ever so long and I never could hide it, and I have heard folks laugh about it. One woman called me a fool, and I reckon I am, but the world would be a heap fuller of smart people if folks could keep from being fools. I wan't more than fourteen when mother moved here. And the first time I ever saw Glich he came to our house with some fresh meat his mother sent, and he stood in front of the fire and made a funny face at me, and danced on the hearth to make me

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laugh, and I thought he was the greatest man in the world and I loved him. Didn't he tell you about me?"

"Yes, but he didn't mention your name; and I remember now he said his parents approved of the engagement."

"Yes, they did, and we would have been married by now if that woman hadn't come. Oh, there must be love powders—she gave them to him. She needn't be putting on airs for my father drove a stage over on the old turnpike while her father drove a wagon—just a common wagon."

It was a fine drawing of the caste line and I smiled, whereupon with eyes open wide she said: "Yes, just a common wagon, but my father sat away up on top of the stage, with his hands full of reins, and he could blow a horn beautiful. She needn't put on any airs over me."

"She doesn't love him," I said, in the way of an encouragement. Her eyes filled with a resplendent anger.

"Don't love him? Oh, yes she does. And why shouldn't she? Do you reckon she is fool enough to think herself above him? She better not tell me that, the uppish thing. I hate her, and one of these days I'll claw her like a cat. I wouldn't go to her old school—I'd rather be as ignorant as a nigger. I walked six miles over on the ridge last winter rather than to go to her, and I'd do it again but I have to stay at home since my sister married and went away. Do you think that thing's pretty with her hook-nose and owl eyes? I think she's horrid."

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"She will never consent to marry him," said I.

Anger in a shudder-wave arose and shook her. "Oh, yes she will. She may pretend she won't, but just wait till the time comes and you'll see."

Her anger was gone in a moment, burnt out like a squib, and now she fell to whimpering.

"And I did hope there was some sort of powder I could give him. I put so much faith in what the old woman said, and now you tell me there's no such thing. I know there is," she cried, starting up almost fiercely. "I know there is. Mary Craig brought Dick Brice back with powders—she told me so. She got 'em somewhere over on the big road. I know she got 'em, and you've got 'em too, and won't give 'em because you want him to marry her."

I strove to reason with her, but she got up and stamped the floor, pity in a passion. She swore that if I did not give her the powders she would take poison. But her passion was soon spent. The poor thing had but little of the defiant spirit. She was created to bear burdens and to suffer.

"I must go," she said. "I am a fool and I oughtn't to be where anybody is. You mustn't be mad at me, for I didn't mean what I said. I know you would give them to me if you had any. Don't tell him."

She went out with the black mantle wrapped about her head, and I looked after her retreating figure till I heard the big gate open and close, so cruel did it seem to shut the door upon a creature so darkly forlorn.

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CHAPTER XI.

WITH A LEAF IN HER HAIR.

Before morning I was summoned to ride far across the country to the bloody bedside of a man stabbed unto death in a tavern brawl. My attendant urged me on over a rough road and sometimes through vine-tangled underbrush, shouting back scraps of the fight, which he had seen. The wounded man was his cousin and with pride he informed me that "Sam never flinched nor whined, but swallowed his dose like a man." He was dying when we reached his cabin, and I could do nothing for him except to untangle his knotted skein of life—to let him fall easier to sleep. On my way home, and while not far away, I saw a man dismount from his horse and go to a dog, scratching at a stump near the roadside. He examined the stump and then with an oath he kicked the dog. The poor thing howled in agony and my blood boiled. I overtook the fellow. He did not wait for me to speak.

"That liar knowed there wan't nothin' there," he said.

"He may be a liar, but I have more respect for him than I have for you."

"Is that so? Well, has anybody asked your opinion? There's such a thing as a man bein' so much of a stranger in a place as not to know who he's talkin' to. Understand that?"

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"Yes, and there's such a thing as a man not caring."

"Is that so? Well, I ain't afraid to tell you who I am. Understand? I am John Balsch. Know me now?"

He was yellow and squint-eyed. Through the reddened mist of anger before my eyes I saw that he was not young, and this softened me.

"I have never heard of you."

"You hain't? Well, I've heard of you, and I was in hopes to get along with you smooth, as I had a good deal of respect for your daddy."

"And he would have called you a brute for kicking that dog."

"Oh, I reckon not. I was younger when I knowed him, and a man had to be a little more careful what he said to me. But now I'm gittin' old and the young fellows don't care much what they say. But what's the use in us fallin' out? I reckon you are goin' to do right well here," he said with a yellowish leer, which he intended for a smile of pacification. "The folks all seem glad that you've come. I don't have much need of doctors, myself. When anything's the matter with me I go to the woods and dig up roots and chaw 'em and that's the end of it. Well, I live right here in this house. Won't you git down?"

"No, I thank you."

"You thank me. Glad you don't cuss me. There's some chance for a feller as long as folks thank him. I hope you'll recollect not to call me names. I'm as soft and easy as one of them lambs out there, but

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even a sheep ain't called on to put up with everything."

I found Luke walking about in the woods pasture, humming a tune as if his wife's deep praying had got down under his heart to lift it. I walked about with him.

"Oh, old John Balsch," said he, when I had spoken of the fellow. "He's lived there all his life, and I don't believe he's got a friend in the world. He owns a small farm up the road, and must have starved himself nearly to death to get it. Everybody believes he'll steal, but he hasn't been caught. One day your father was riding along and came across him with a rope around a calf's neck, choking him to death. He jumped off his horse and asked the scoundrel's name. 'My name's John Balsch,' said he, taking another twist at the rope. 'Ah, hah,' said your father, 'and my name is Mitford Hudley. You must pardon the hurry of this introduction for I am in great haste to the bedside of a man almost dying of fever.' 'Then why don't you go on,' said Balsch, tugging at the rope. 'Because,' said the doctor, 'I have to stop here long enough to deliver a message sent to you by justice.' And with that he let in with his riding whip and slit Balsch's hide like a gridiron before he could scramble over the fence. Yes, I reckon he did have a good deal of respect for your father. You've had a pretty hard ride, haven't you?"

"Yes, and to no purpose—cutting affray. Sam Patton killed by Dave Hite."

"That so? I'm mighty sorry to hear it. I wonder

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why folks won't learn to let Dave alone. All right and kind hearted as long as he's not interfered with. I'm mighty sorry. He and Glich have always been the best of friends. It's too bad. And Patton leaves his wife as poor as she can be—hasn't a dollar in the world. More blood for the old tavern. Old Davy Crockett was there one night when a fight broke out. He sat by the fire for quite a while looking at the fight, but not being able to keep down his emotions any longer—for he was reminded of home—he cried out: 'Come here, somebody, and introduce me to the master of these ceremonies, for I'm devilish lonesome. I'm Davy Crockett, and I'm on my way to Congress to keep the politicians from robbing the country. Who are you?' 'That so?' a big fellow, evidently the leader, cried out. 'Glad to meet you, but I must apologize for this sort of fighting. It must seem like child's play to you—only three men down. Come now, everybody. Quit your foolishness and keep quiet for old Davy is going to tell us a yarn.' Yes, sir, they tell of a good many scollops cut in that old tavern, first and last. But go on, and get your breakfast."

While it was yet early I strolled about in the woods. The air was biting in the shade and yawning in the sun. Summer's scattered retreat and Winter's bold advance were skirmishing. I saw Luke and his wife in their heavy buggy, going to church, and upon returning to the house I found Glich alone in the sitting-room brooding over the fire. He looked up as I entered and leaned back in his chair."

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"Dave oughtn't have killed him," he said. "There must have been some way out of it. Think of Sam's poor wife. We've all got to throw in and help her. I'll go out and see what can be done. But she's as proud as a peacock, even if she is poor, and I'll bet she won't take a cent. You can always gamble on a woman's pride standing square against her interest. Now I wonder why the deuce she don't come on downstairs," he added, with an upward turn of his eyes. "What makes her want to mope over that book? Doctor, I wish she'd deal me a better hand. She keeps me drawing to four flushes all the time. She's got the cards stacked and she knows I can't fill. You ought to be smart in such matters. Do you think she'll marry me?"

"I don't know who originated the saying—Adam, perhaps—but nobody can tell what a woman will do."

"I know all that. I know it's like turning a fox loose and betting on whether he'll run up hill or down. But you can tell me what you believe—how you would bet. The only way to get at what a man thinks is to find out which way he would bet. Don't be afraid of peeling the bark off me."

"I don't believe she loves you."

"That may be, but confound it, I'll make her love me; I'll be like a disease and I'll stick to her till I wear her out. I'll dig under her constitution—I'll make her give in to save her life."

"I admire your courage, but she might wear you out. Indifference can be more patient than love."

"Yes, but it can't hit as hard."

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"That's true. But don't you think you'd better try gentleness, instead of force?"

"There might be sense in that. But I can't be gentle. It's too slow. By George, I believe she likes you. But you've given me your word. Still, that wouldn't keep her from liking you. Whenever you see a woman fooling round with a book you may gamble that it's not her nature to take to a man that works with his hands. But I don't work to hurt. I can swop horses and fool around and make more money than I can at work. I wanted to give her a horse, but she wouldn't take him. Well, it's going to come out just as it is and no other way. But she'd make a man of me, doctor."

"I don't think so."

"You don't? That's pretty cool. But she'd pour brandy into my life. I tell you that."

"And you might be in a half-drunken vigor for a time and then—weakness. Woman has made politicians, and statesmen, perhaps; she has accomplished it by the forces of her own ambition, and she must have had peculiar material to work on. Her love, of itself, doesn't stimulate; it is more likely to foster an inactive contentment."

"All right, doctor. When you are on the mountain and I'm down in the flat, I won't argue with you as to what you see. But all the same I believe she'd make a man of me."

"A politician or a statesman?"

"Well, I don't know exactly as to what sort of a man. Why, she'd keep me dancing to hold her love. She'd keep my blood circulating, and you let a fellow

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keep up quick blood year after year and the first thing you know he'll amount to something."

"When you come to marry," said I, with a picture of Mattie Boyce in my mind, "I think it would be better to choose heart rather than brain."

"Why not take both?" he replied, his eyes turned upward.

"If you can get both, yes."

"Well, I will, and you'll see it. Oh, I'm the hardest man to down you ever saw."

He got up, and resting one hand on the edge of the mantel-piece, kicked the chunks together in the fire. He said that he would bring in more wood, and then, regardless of the fact that it was Sunday, go to look at a horse in a neighboring stable. He did not think that on Sunday there was any more sin in placing an estimate on a horse with a view to a trade, than there was in looking at a field and speculating upon the yield of grain. He mended the fire with a great log, which he brought in on his shoulder, and hastened off to look at the horse. Shortly afterward Miss Silvester came down. She bowed to me, a sibilant sound falling from her lips. She was dressed in a blue gown which might have been ripped from the outer edge of a cloudless sky, and her hair was fluffed over her temples. Looking straight into her eyes, I thought again that she was handsome, but as she turned slightly to sit down, her Indian nose smote upon me like a sarcasm.

"Did Glich go away?" she asked, with mischief in her eyes.

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"Yes, but I fancy a mere whisper from you would bring him back."

"Indeed," she laughed. "Oh, did you have a pleasant walk through the woods yesterday evening?"

"Delightful. I could think aloud."

She smiled. "Is it so rare that a woman inspires a thought and then permits a perfectly free utterance of it? I suppose, however, a woman is not supposed to inspire thought. Her mission is to arouse chatter."

"Her mission is to shape destinies."

"Dresses, you mean."

"A destiny is all the more attractive for being well-dressed."

"Oh, I'm glad to see that I am to be of service to you, doctor. You whet your lancet on me."

"But I whet it and hand it to you."

"I am too gracious to cut you with it."

"But are you too generous not to keep it pointed at Glich's heart?"

"That's unkind. If Glich is ever cut, he cuts himself. I have heard that on shipboard the passengers soon become to know one another's inner lives. But I fancy that in this respect a farmhouse in these distant woods discounts a ship. I suppose he has told you that he has asked me to marry him."

"He did, but he needn't have done so; I could see it for myself."

"And didn't he say he was afraid I might like you?"

I stammered under the straight look of her eyes. With a smile she bade me speak out. I acknowledged

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that he had and she laughed, and in her laughter there was something that told me I need have no fear. I saw that I had a strong character to deal with, an individual with those sinewy traits of mind supposed to be masculine.

"Glich is so strong that his strength is sometimes in his way," she said. "It makes him awkward, and awkward men never love wisely. Why don't I give him a final answer? Because I prefer to let his infatuation wear itself out. And it will. He is a powerful fellow—and it's the frail man who loves unto death."

I felt that she was talking to surprise herself with oddities, whimsical fancies uttered as convictions. And yet I wondered why she assumed to know so much of men, having always lived so far from man's most active struggles. Her absorbing eye must have drawn an inkling from my musing.

"I was born on the old road and brought up in the woods, but leaves with words printed on them sometimes fall in the forest. But I lived in town during my school days."

"Your school days were happy, no doubt."

"They were ambitious hours almost embittered by the knowledge of a humiliating barter."

I looked at her to search for her meaning, and with a frank smile, though with a luminous mystery in her eyes, she met my gaze.

"I don't understand."

"You don't know what I mean by a humiliating barter."

"No. Will you please enlighten me?"

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"And confess a shameful pride and a pitiable weakness yoked together, pulling apart like young steers with sore necks? Would you have me do that?"

"I don't know that I would have you make a shameful confession—no. But why did you even hint at it?"

She said that she did not know. But after all the confession would not be so very shameful—only embarrassing. Why hint at a thing even though it be only embarrassing? She did not know that, either. It was her way, she said, to hint at confessions she never intended to make. And if I did not like her way, and it was a poor way at best, then I must soon become tired of her company. But she was glad to see that I had exhibited even a slight interest in her. She liked men with curiosity—they were so human.

And thus we talked till Glich returned. He stood for a moment in the door, his gaze leaping forth to devour her. She gave him a smile and a nod. He came forward and sat down near her. He might be her slave but he was bold; and with more courage than many a brave man, he refused to take notes of his own awkwardness. I arose to go. It might have been my vanity that construed in her eyes a look of reproach.

At evening I sat alone in the office. The sun had sunk in a muddle of clouds, and vagrant gusts of wind, springing up from ambush in the woods, scattered showers of leaves on my roof. I sat with an old book, the record of many a medical error,

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published at a time when bleeding was thought to be the physical salvation of man. With the gory tome my father had sat, listening to the howling of the wolves, both the book and the wolves clamoring for blood. Now the wolves were gone, and the book—a mummy. From the window there came a sound louder than the flutter of a dead leaf. I looked up and a face drew back from the pane. It passed like a vision from the twilight at the window out into the darkness, but when it was gone the eye remained with me; and opening the door I called, "Come in, Lady."

Then there came a laugh, a rustle of leaves, and the girl.

"How did you know who it was, Little Mitford? You couldn't see me in the dark."

"There is no dark where you are, little one."

"Oh, to call me little and I'm nearly as tall as Miss Silvester. But I call you little, and you are way up yonder, ain't you? Mammy Polly's at the house, and I came off down here to see you. May I sit down and look at the skeletons in your books?"

"You may sit down and talk to me."

"I will. Are you glad I came?"

"Can't you see I am?"

"Yes; but at the house they said I'd bother you, and if I do you must tell me, so I can go on away. Will you tell me?"

"Yes, just as soon as you bother me."

This pleased her. She sat down with her little feet thrust forth to the fire. She looked about the room, turning her head slowly, as if every object

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held her with a moment's interest. Her hat was off and a frost-brightened leaf shown in her hair.

"It's much nicer now than it was when Dr. Hatch was here," she said.

"The room is just the same."

"Yes, I know the room is, but everything else is different. The things that make the most difference are the ones you can't see. You don't know what they are, but they are there 'cause you can feel 'em. How long would I have to sit here before you'd get tired and tell me to run along now? But you needn't answer me when you don't want to. People don't have to answer me and I don't have to be particular what I say to people. Ain't that nice?"

"You are like a bird, Lady. You don't sing because anyone asks you to, but because there's music in your heart."

She clapped her hands and shook her head till the frost-painted leaf flew from her hair and fluttered into the fire. "Oh, I like that," she laughed. "It makes something jump right here," she said, touching her breast. She looked at me with her eyes half closed, the lids trembling. We heard old Miss Polly coming, talking loud in the wind. I opened the door for her.

"Goodness me, folks always know when I'm comin'," she said, stepping into the room. "I never can slip up on nobody, and as soon as I start from home the neighbors begin to open doors. And here sits Lady as smily as you please. But come, we must be startin' home."

"I'd rather stay here," said the girl,

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"Of course you would, my dear, but you can't. Law me, how she do put me in mind of myself a settin' right here, waitin' for your father to fix up medicine for me to take home. There's been many a heart cold in the fear that a loved one couldn't live through the night, a settin' right here tryin' to warm itself. Come, wrap your shawl round your head, for the wind cuts like a knife. Now tell the doctor good-night."

"Good-night, Little Mitford," she said, and held out her brown, bewitching hand.

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CHAPTER XII.

BURIED A BONE.

To be permitted to sit by the fire and dream had been my hope, and I dreamed night after night, listening to the wind and sleet; but frequently my dreams were disturbed, for my practice was growing. This was somewhat due to the influence of family name, but it was largely brought about by the fact that an old doctor had left off his midnight riding, and at the behest of life's most ancient enemy, to be slowly rocked along the road to the place where old apple trees sunk their roots into the mold of man. Before I had been six weeks in the neighborhood three babies, experimental lodgers in humble households, had been named for me—compliments returnable in free professional services. Luke was immensely tickled. He advised me to post notices at the cross-roads, setting forth that my name could be given to only three infants during any one year. His wife looked up at him. She was sitting by the fire in her ponderous chair. He was standing on the hearth with his hands behind him. She did not understand why any man could object to being honored, and any man ought to feel proud when a sweet little baby was named for him. The old fellow agreed that it was an honor.

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"But if you think so, why do you wink at the doctor?"

"Did I wink?"

"Yes, you did, and when you wink that way I know you're making fun of me."

"I'll pledge you my word I didn't wink. Did I, doctor? Oh, well, I might have winked just a little. No particular meaning in a man's winking when he's got something in his eye."

He had mischief in his eye, and she caught him winking again. "You make so much fun of me that you do it when you're not thinking about it," she said. "I must be a sight to see and to think about when a body can't keep from making fun of me whether or no."

The old man's eyes laughed. I could almost imagine that I heard them tittering as he looked upon her. His mouth was half open, and I heard the gurgle of fun deep within him. And she couldn't keep from laughing. "Oh, Luke, you're such a simpleton, you make me snicker right out when I ought to be thinking of something serious. Don't grab at me that way. You are such a goose, and the doctor right here looking at you, too. Don't shake me that way."

"The goose that would make us snicker is better for us to be with than the wiser bird that would make us cry," he said, the laughter in his eyes sobering with the thought.

Glich came in, having just returned from an overnight's stay in town.

"Oh, there you are," his mother cried, spying him

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at the door. "I was getting mighty uneasy about you. Sit down and I'll go out and see that you get something to eat."

"Don't get up, mother. I ate down the road. Nothing would do old Balsch but I must get down and eat at his house, and I did."

"You've got your father's appetite," she replied. "When you're hungry you must eat, and it don't make much difference who with. Gracious knows I'd have to be mighty nigh starved before I'd eat with old Balsch. Now, Luke, what are you chuckling at? Is it such a light thing to eat with that old wretch? Didn't I have to grab hold of you once to keep you from choking the life out of him?"

"Yes," said Glich, "and that's the reason I got down to eat with him."

"You may well say you got down to eat with him," his mother replied, and Luke stood looking on, his humor bubbling.

"When you've made a fellow quail and he gets up and tries to act the gentleman with you, why he's got you about whipped," said Glich. "I don't like him—got no respect for that sort of cattle, but when he—"

"Found you hungry you were willing to eat," Luke put in. "Oh, I reckon the boy's heart's in the right place, mother. But, Glich, did you see Hines about the walnut trees?"

"Yes, and the trade's about settled at my figures. I am to meet him again this evening over at the tavern."

"Why couldn't he come here instead of having

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you go away over there?" his mother asked, her countenance clouding. "You'll be there at night."

"Yes, but what of it? I know the way back."

"But you know why I don't like to have you there after dark, my son."

"Yes, I know; but it will be all right. Don't worry about me. If you keep on, I'll make dad laugh at you. Don't look at me that way, mother. I know what you mean—I'll take care of myself."

I left them talking and went out to walk in the bracing air, and shortly afterward, while strolling through the gray grass near the highway, I heard the beating of hoofs on the hard road—Glich going to the tavern. He waved his hand at me and rode on, with easy rise and fall to the trotting of his horse. Something red flashed above the corner of the fence, a great woodpecker it looked like till I drew nearer, and discovered the outlines of a woman's head surmounted by a mantle of red yarn. She appeared to be gazing after the young man, an admirer in hiding. She heard the whispery crackle of the frosted grass and turned about, presenting the anxious features of Mattie Boyce. She saw me, and her red topknot ducked out of sight behind the fence, but when I called to her it showed again, bobbing like a pecking bird. We walked along, the fence between us.

"He will come back in a minute as soon as he gets to that chestnut tree bendin' over the road on the top of the hill."

"He is going over to the tavern," said I. "What

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makes you think he'll turn back when he gets to the chestnut tree?"

We had reached a wagon gap in the fence and had halted. "I buried a snake bone in the road under the tree. I got it from the old woman, and she told me what to do with it. He can't pass it. See, he's ridin' slower."

"It is uphill," I said.

"But that wouldn't make any difference. I've seen him gallop up it many a time. His horse is walkin'. He's nearly to the tree. The old woman swore she made a man come back that way, and he married her."

"What did you give her for the snake bone?"

"My—my Sunday shoes for her granddaughter and some money I got for milk. Oh, he's at the tree." She clasped her hands, gazing.

"He is past it," I said.

"No, no—yes, he is. But he can't go much farther."

"He's galloping now."

She dropped on her knees and bowed her head. "Come," I besought her, "don't kneel here; the ground is cold." I touched her arm, but she shrank from me, sobbing. "I don't know what to say to you, Miss Boyce—Mattie. At times the softest word is harsh—I mean that I don't know how to talk to a woman anyway; I have lived nearly all my life among men. But let me beg of you not to kneel here. Please don't cry. Your doll is broken, but it can't be helped. I don't mean your doll, either. I don't know what I mean. That is, I

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don't know how to get at what I want to say. But you mustn't take on this way. The old woman is a cheat and a liar. But he shall come back to you. Yes, he shall; I give you my word."

She sprang to her feet, catching at a new hope. I had committed myself to the almost impossible, to force his love to return to her. She was ready to cling to me as if I were a cross. Her look of trustfulness smote me. In my heedless endeavor to quiet her distress I had stamped myself with the brand of fraud. But conscience, ever seeking applause, was applauded. I had acted from tenderness; I had received no payment from a tortured heart, and thereupon I advanced farther toward the end of consolation.

"I will see that the teacher—"

The trustful light in her eyes died a sudden death. "I won't beg her—I hate her. I'll claw her eyes out. Don't you dare let her pity me."

"I won't let her pity you. But she can help you without pitying you—without knowing that she does help you. She can tell Glich once for all that she won't marry him. That will bring him to his senses. But you mustn't be impatient; you must wait."

"I will; I will wait ever so long, if you say he shall come back. Oh, I wish he'd get sick so I could nurse him. Once he was—was drunk, and wouldn't go to the house, and I brought water and a towel out in the woods and bathed his head, and he swore he never would forget me, but he has."

"But he shall recall you with a stronger memory,"

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I said, determined that my encouragement should not stop at a half-way house.

She rewarded me with a look of perfect trust. "I will believe you, and I won't pay any attention to the old woman or anybody else. The old woman's mean. Now I'll go home happy," she said.

She lived in a cottage near the roadside, not far away, and I looked after her as she ran with hope in her ill-shod feet. I saw her halt in the door, beneath a dry and lifeless gourd vine that clung, a ghost of verdure, upon the wall; and then I heard her laugh at something within. My sympathy had been quick to deceive her; poverty had promised an expensive toy; but the music of her laughter was sweet to my soul, and conscience whispered: "Even a trick that causes a poor heart to laugh is better than many a cool virtue that goes about rebuking sin."

I strode onward up the hill; I stood in a muse beneath the chestnut tree where the girl had buried the snake bone. Could I not in some way enlist the assistance of the teacher? It was about her time of day for quitting the school. I turned away, crossed a field, followed a path, and met Miss Silvester in the woods. I thought that she saw me some time before we came within easy speaking distance—I am certain that I saw her eyes—but she came forward with her head hung, and when I spoke she looked up with a start.

"Oh, it's you, doctor!"

"Were you expecting someone else?"

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"Now that's unkind. Of course not. I never expect anyone."

I turned about and walked beside her where the path was broad enough, and where it was not I followed close behind, she continuing to talk, for, having never learned repose, she was an enemy of silence.

"A patient out this way, doctor?"

"No, I came to meet you."

"Indeed! We see each other nearly every day, and I've had no intimation of anything so important as a special meeting—and a long walk at that. But a sudden thing may be important; an emergency case, eh, doctor?"

I was walking behind her. She turned slightly and gave me a look, her eyes wide with pretended wonderment.

"I was on Chestnut Hill, and I thought it might be pleasant—for me, at least—to cross over and walk home with you."

"Oh, that was it. And you didn't have to come far out of your way. I'm glad you were thoughtful enough not to put yourself to any trouble."

She was always ready for a cynical bout, and no matter what I had ever intended to say upon meeting her at any time, she always forced me to put off saying it.

"Coming to meet you, no matter how great the distance, should never be looked upon as a trouble."

"Really. Your legs are very generous, I must say."

"I don't find you in very good humor."

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"Oh, splendid. The children have been so obedient and orderly. How I love the dear things."

"Does Lady Edwards come regularly?"

"Yes; regularly for her. She has come every day for the past week. She's been particularly bright of late—a result of your treatment of her, I presume."

"You are very kind to presume so. But I haven't begun a systematic treatment. I have read a number of books on insanity, and I find that she stands an individual case. In fact, disturbances of the mental functions are rather difficult to class, composed as they are of individual ailments acting in accordance with temperament. Each case becomes almost a character. Religious fanaticism comes nearest establishing a type, for religious dementia does not admit of much distinctiveness. Lady is a strong believer, but she is not an enthusiast. I am of the opinion that the only hope for her lies in a scientific course in an asylum."

"But," said the teacher, "she will never consent to go there, and I don't blame her. After all, I don't know but she's as well, if not better, off than the rest of us. She sees brighter colors and deeper shades than we do; she hears a music that can never reach our ears; she is protected from disappointments, and that of itself is a special blessing. She seems to know what love is, but she doesn't very well comprehend the formation of marriage ties; still, I don't know but she's better off than the rest of us."

The path was broad and I was now walking

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beside her. "You say that she doesn't comprehend the formation of marriage ties. I suppose not, or at least I have never sounded her on the subject. But I know a young woman not far from here who has an agonized conception of prospective marriage ties."

"Of prospective marriage ties! Agonized conception! I always have to guess at your meanings. You must mean the girl who lives at the foot of Chestnut Hill—Mattie Boyce."

"Yes, I mean her; but I don't know that I would have mentioned her name."

"Then what would have been the use of meaning her?"

"I don't know that there would have been any use."

"Then why introduce her even by an allusion?"

"I suspect that you know why. You have seen her, of course, and you must have heard a good deal about her—with a reference to yourself, perhaps."

"With a reference to myself? But I insist upon direct information as to why she was introduced. Yes, I have seen her, and I know that she refused to come to my school. And that doesn't argue a very amiable disposition."

"Do you know why she refused?"

"Oh, I might guess, along with my usual struggle to discover what you mean."

"You don't need to guess; you know."

"Well, say that I do. And that leads back to the first why. What is your object in introducing her now? Tell me."

"She and Glich were engaged."

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"But what is that to me? There may be hundreds of young men and women engaged all over the country, but what have I to do with it?"

"You have nothing to do with it, I fear."

"Oh, you fear. But why don't you say what you mean?"

"I will when you have permitted me to drop this sparring. I'll attempt it now, if you please."

She glanced at me and bowed slightly. A dead briar caught the hem of her skirt. She halted; I put my foot on the briar. "Thank you," she said, stepping forward again. I continued: "She may not be very strong-minded; I don't think she is. Her heart rules her mind. She loves and can't hide it."

"Poor thing," said Miss Silvester.

"Yes, pitiable thing. I have seen her on her knees in an agony of despair."

"On her knees. I hope she won't carry her supplication so far as to kneel to me."

"You needn't fear that. She would die rather than to kneel to you."

"Oh, a desperate heroine. And who has taught her to believe me so merciless?"

"Glich—his infatuation."

"Simply his infatuation? I'm glad no one has pictured me as—shall I say, a witch?"

"His infatuation is sufficient to teach her that, and even more. It may sound strange to you, and even tenderer-hearted persons may not be able to grasp it, but she is almost dying of love for him."

"Tenderer-hearted persons than I? Oh, there are

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many, no doubt. I confess that my heart is too weak to grasp it very tightly. As for myself, I can't conceive of anyone almost dying of that disease. Perhaps I wasn't born to be wheedled to frenzy by love. I read of love, the rapture of the poet and the slow-running syrup of the romancer, and I smile. Oh, it may be well enough for a man, but for a woman—a sprinkle of gold dust on an iron chain. But what were you saying?"

"I was going to say that the poor creature believes you are in love with Glich."

She shrieked with laughter, sprung at a grape-vine, and swung herself off the ground. And how striking she was—her graceful figure, her flushed face, and her eyes full of a poisonous witchery. She dropped lightly to the ground.

"She believes it," I said, as we resumed our walk in the broad path.

"She does? And what did you tell her?"

"That you didn't."

"That I didn't, I don't, and never shall. You ought to have told her all that, and then you would have been nearer the mark."

"I said you would never marry him."

"So kind of you to soothe her with a truth. How rare it is that we find a soothing truth. When I was a child, I had to lie to protect the skin on my back, and I imagined that truth was a set of stiff bristles rising up to invite punishment. But you were saying?"

"I was going to say that if you don't intend to marry him, why don't you tell him so?"

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"Did you ever hear how they used to kill bears, doctor? They'd suspend a big log crossways in a big tree. A bear would climb up after honey. Finding the log in the way, he would give it a shove to one side. It would swing back and hit him on the head. Then he would give it a harder shove, and it would swing back and hit him harder. And the result? He would fight the log till it pounded his head to a jelly."

"And Glich is fighting the log?" said I.

"That's the way they used to kill bears," she replied.

"Was no bear strong enough to escape?"

"They found him at the root of the tree," she said.

"Ah, and I presume we must wait till this bear is knocked out of the tree; and when he is, she will come and bathe his jellied head. But isn't there some way to frighten him down out of the tree? Seriously, have you told him that you never intend to marry him? Haven't you quibbled with him? Haven't you rather enjoyed the fact that this powerful young fellow is but a frail twig in your graceful hands?"

"How kind of you, doctor, never to forget that you are a Southern gentleman. Graceful hands! I could almost get down on my knees to you."

She had beaten me. I had failed to touch her heart in behalf of the girl who had sorrowed by the roadside and laughed beneath the dead gourd vine. I wondered if she were really insensible to the appeal of a sentimental pity.

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CHAPTER XIII.

SOLD HERSELF.

There was no one in the sitting-room when we arrived at the house. A fire which Miss Silvester said looked glad was there to welcome us. She stood on the hearth to warm her hands, for the air outside was cutting. She glanced about for a chair, a command, and I brought her the easy rocker. We sat down, she to gaze into the fire, and I to study her face, the cruel side, the sharp edge.

"You think I'm lacking in sympathy," she said, looking at me, the firelight dancing in her eyes.

"Yes, you forced me to think so."

"But I'm not. I sympathize with the girl—for being such a goose. But I would give anything to feel, just for one hour, what she feels. I would like to know what it is to love that deeply; I'd like to be heart-mad for an hour."

"One hour might be two eternities."

"Yes; but I should know that I had lived completely. There are thousands of women who have never lived a minute."

"Thousands of men, too."

"I mean thousands of women who have never loved," she said. "They have accepted the chain without the sprinkling of gold dust." In silence she gazed into the fire. Thought plowed a furrow

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across her brow. "Would you advise me to call on Miss Boyce?" she asked.

"I don't feel warranted in giving such advice."

"Then what can I do?"

"You can compel Glich to understand that you won't marry him."

"I have tried. But you don't know how set he is—a thirsty ox breaking through a garden to get to water, is what he is. And look at his neck—bull, at a county fair. With him there is no courtship's bower; it is more like what I conceive to be a prize ring. He comes at me in his giant strength and boxes me about. And do you know I can't help liking him for it? Once or twice he has begun to soften and to whine, and then I didn't like him so well. He must have been drinking, for he talked sentiment through his nose. It's when he comes at me with his muscle that I like him. The other day he called me a fool; it was a particular kind of a fool. He said that he would like to slap me out into the yard and across the road. I wondered what would be the physical and mental sensations of being slapped by a man, and I went to bed, my blood tingling with the excitement of his charming rage, mused over him as I lay there, and I almost loved him."

"You are a most unnatural woman."

Her brows went up to give broad scope to her look of surprise.

"Unnatural, doctor? Oh, no, it is the confession of naturalness—my own sort of naturalness, perhaps—that astonishes you. All natural women admire

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men, not the lady's man, but the man's man. And if he's just a little brutal in his overflow of strength, why she puts it down to nature, and likes him the better for it. I do. It may be my 'ostler instinct. I know it is largely due to my contempt for weakness and little things. I suppose I could be as happy with Glich as with anyone, for if I am to have a master, let me have a masterful one. But I love liberty. And I doom myself to the life of a stilted old maid teacher. You remember once, sitting here, I spoke of a humiliating barter?"

"I remember, and you have hinted at it several times since. What was it?"

"I am woman enough — natural enough," she added, smiling, "to feel almost bound to tell someone, for it is a secret."

"I should feel honored by your confidence."

"Would you? Oh, thank you, ever so much. But really, I owe you something for your consideration of me. You have complimented my understanding by being frank with me. You have even complimented my hands. You have permitted your sympathy to condemn me, it is true, but you have spoken of my graceful hands, and that made you worthy of all confidence."

"You decide to give me your confidence, but you can't without a boxing match," said I.

"But a confidence is more valuable when we have fought to restrain it. But really, I will tell you. Once I told you that I waited on table at the tavern. One day an oldish-looking man sat at my

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table. He spoke kindly to me, and that enlisted me to serve him attentively."

"I should have thought that a slap would have drawn you closer to him," said I. "You admire brutality, and should be grateful for a box on the ear, you know."

"In courtship, but not in business," she replied, laughing. "I don't carry sentiment into business. Well, I served him well and was rewarded by a weak smile and a slight show of interest. Several days later he came again. This time I won a closer attention. He talked to me. I wasn't humble; I spoke what I thought, and this pleased him. Three days later he came again, and after dinner I had a long talk with him. He asked my age. I was fifteen. He called me handsome. I screwed up my face at him, and he laughed. He asked me what I had read, and I answered that I had read nothing. He asked if I could read, and I told him that I could stumble over the letters like a boy with a sore foot walking over a rough place. He laughed and called me bright, and looked to see if I had screwed up my face at him. I hadn't, and it pleased him. Well, I saw him a number of times. One evening he asked me to meet him in the parlor after my work was done. I told him to come to the kitchen, and he did. 'Now, I've got a plan to submit to you,' he said. 'Can you write your name?' I told him that I could scratch something that looked like it. Then he took out a paper and astonished me with a proposition. He was to send me to the academy in Gallatin, pay all my bills, and I was to marry him

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the day after my graduation. You must not ask me his name. I signed the paper and went to bed, happy for the first time in my life. The next day I left the tavern. The landlady thought I was going out to hunt for another place. At school I sprung at my book like a hungry dog at a bone. I actually caught myself gnawing my speller in my half crazy desire to learn. I learned fast, and I was soon a miner digging up nuggets. The other girls laughed at me —they called me a robber. At vacation the man came to see me, and interrupted my study. I had not put aside my books when school closed. He wanted me to go home and stay at his house till school reopened—said it would be cheaper—but I refused. Well, it went on thus year after year. I did not return to visit the tavern. I hated the place. And now I began to shudder as the closing day drew near. Good-by to my freedom, my study. The man had begun to show objectionable traits. I could forgive his age, but he exhibited his fist and it was tight. He was penurious. Everything he had bought for me was of the cheapest. The great night came, and I read the valedictory. My victory pleased him, and his cackle made me shudder. The next morning he called at my boarding-house. 'We have waited a long time,' he said, sitting down and taking out a paper. 'I have been put to a good deal of expense, and I'm glad to know that it's over.' He read out the amount, down to a cent. I wondered why he brought out his figures on his wedding day. I was not long in the dark. 'Now,' said he, 'the greatest virtue is to pay what we owe. I advanced

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you this money (and again he rolled off the dollars and flipped off the cents), and I expect you to make it all good in your management of my house, by your economy, you understand. Every time you prove to me that you have saved a cent, I will credit you with it; and after a while—years, of course—you will have discharged your debt.' I was perfectly calm—I was ice. 'Let me have the paper,' said I, and he gave it to me. 'I will keep it,' I assured him, 'and will pay back the money with interest.' 'Good,' he cried. 'Oh, I thought you were made of the right sort of stuff. Now, as to the wedding. We don't want any great to do, you know. It is necessary that you begin your economy at once, you understand. So we'll step round to a justice of the peace and have him marry us without any flutter. He won't charge us much. You put on your things, and I'll go over to the court-house and get the license.' 'Wait a moment,' said I, as he reached for his hat. 'I am grateful to you for the opportunity to snatch up an education, but you have permitted me to go too far—to love freedom, and to hate slavery. I will repay you to the last cent, and with interest, but not in savings from your kitchen; I will work for myself.' 'But you are to marry me,' he cried. 'You signed this paper,' and he brought out the agreement. I snatched it, threw it upon the floor and trod upon it. He raved, but he quieted down, as he was afraid of attracting attention. 'I will pay you every cent,' said I. 'You said with interest,' he cried. 'Yes, with interest.' 'Well,' he said, 'I reckon that will have to do—that

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is, for the present. The law is on my side, if I was a mind to push it, but, you see, I am generous with you.' 'Very,' I replied. 'In addition to my soul and body, you demanded an extra pound of flesh.' 'Don't talk so loud,' he cautioned, and added: 'Oh, I think it will work round all right yet. I'm afraid that you couldn't be very economical right at once, and that rather reconciles me to the turn of affairs, but I've taken a liking to you, and I believe we can fix it up some way. But please don't forget the money and the interest. How do you expect to pay me?' 'I am going to teach school.' 'All right,' he replied. 'I will help you to get a place. I'll now bid you good-day.' Off he went—the strangest man I ever saw—and since then my one aim has been to pay him. Out of my salary I deduct the amount of my board, and a few dollars for clothes, and give him the rest. He still has hope of winning me over to himself and economy. He has seen that I can save money, and this has endeared me to him. He has even gone so far as to say that if I'll marry him he'll agree to throw off the interest. Perhaps I ought to have married him, having consented to sell myself, but I couldn't, and that is the only excuse I have to offer. And this is the reason, this barter of soul, my friend, that may make me appear lacking in sympathy. In the air above everything sacred I hear a sound of mockery, and whenever I think of marriage up comes that expense account with the nightmare of so much to be saved before you can be permitted to catch a glimpse of freedom from obligation. Liberty—I love the word. It

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means more than knowledge; more than love. And now, tell me, doctor, do you blame me?"

"I honor you," I replied. "The child bartered to deliver something that did not belong to her—the soul of a woman."

"Oh," she cried, "you throw a consoling light on it. Sometimes my conscience, or rather my sense of honesty, is just a little touched, and then I have to steel myself against a regret at my ill-treatment of a benefactor."

"But," said I, "it was all resolved to dollars and cents, and you are repaying him."

"Yes, as fast as I can. I pay him something every month; and every time I see him he urges me to marry him. Once he agreed to knock off one-third if I would consent to an early marriage, and on another occasion he refused to accept the monthly installment, but he thought better of it and came back for his money. I had to laugh at his uneasiness. 'I beg your pardon,' said he, 'but I have always made it a rule to take my money whenever offered, and I'm getting along too far in life now to change my habits. Let me have it, please.' I gave it to him, and counting it, he said: 'One dollar and twenty cents short of last month.' 'Yes, I bought a pair of gloves,' said I. He looked at me, his mouth drawn as if he were about to whistle. 'A pretty stiff price for a pair of gloves,' he declared. 'But don't worry over it. They may last you a good while.'"

She leaned back, with a sigh. "And that was my romance, doctor."

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"Not a romance, Miss Silvester—a masquerade. A romance is beautiful, a rose-vine clinging to a palace or a hut."

She sighed again. "But it dies soon. The shade of an oak is better than the scent of the vine. But liberty—liberty is worth everything."

"Without it there isn't anything," said I. "It is better to be a mouse in the field than the lion in the cage."

"Then you really don't blame me?"

"I said that I honored you."

"So you did. And you spoke of my graceful hands. You have been so very kind to-day. You must know that you get close to me when you speak of my hands. I have washed dishes so much—"

"Cold as Kris Kringle's sneeze," said Luke, stamping at the door to warn us of his coming. "The cedar tree out there is full of yellow-hammers," he added, entering. "The wind's straight from the north, and we'll have snow before morning. I went down to the lower meadow to drive up the sheep, but I couldn't find them—they've jumped over into the woods. And I wonder why Glich don't come on back. But he's hardly had time yet; still his mother has already begun to fret about him. There's a noise out there that says supper is ready," he said, rubbing his hands. "No, sir, no use to fret about him. Come, and let's eat a snack. Yes, sir, it's snowing right now," he added, as he stepped out into the passage.

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CHAPTER XIV.

WANTED AN UNDERSTANDING.

Alone in my office I listened to the muttering of the fire and the sharp hiss of the snow blowing down the chimney into the blaze. Over Miss Silvester I mused, and her features seemed less cruel. I could have moralized—we can all of us draw out a moral—but I did not. With one impulse I placed her in the right, remembering with pleasure her apparent gratitude at my saying that a child had bartered to deliver the soul of a woman. And she had a soul; not such as at times shone from Lady Edwards' eyes, dimmed of mind though she was, yet a real soul and a sense of honesty. I am inclined to believe that women are more nearly honest than men. In money matters, assuredly. Women pay doctors' bills, and a man may, too, but it appears to hurt him mightily.

Across my mind a light streaked, like the wake of a glowworm—perhaps the teacher had it remote in her heart to surrender to Glich. If this should prove true my word to Mattie Boyce would be as idle as the old woman's assurance, even though not so criminal. It was idle at best. But it had been spoken to relieve distress; an opiate to induce a short sleep, and in her sleep she had dreamed and laughed. But I was beginning to moralize.

There came a stamping at the doorstep outside.

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I opened the door and there stood a man covered with snow. He called me by name, still stamping. He shook his hat and shook himself with a great shudder, to throw off the clinging snow. I did not recognize him till he stepped into the room and then I recalled the scythe nose of Tuck Bethpage.

"Glad to run to cover such a night as this, doctor," he said, stamping upon the hearth. "It's a snorter, right out of the nostrils of the North." He sat down and thrust out his boots, covered with coarse patches, doubtless done by himself. "I'm on my way from town, and I thought I'd stop and warm. Haven't seen you very much lately. I'm rather pleased to come into a doctor's office when it doesn't cost anything. But I thought I'd have to call on you the other night. My sister was taken sick. Yes, sir, and for a while I thought I'd have to ride, but I told her to worry along a little longer—and she was willing; she's as saving a creature as ever lived. And after a while things took a turn for the better and she got all right. Patience having its reward, I told her. Business pretty fair with you, doctor?"

"Yes, very good," I answered, a tickle running through my blood. His self-congratulation upon having escaped a visit from me and his inquiry as to my affairs was a tingling amusement to me.

"Glad to hear it, doctor. I'm always glad to know that a man's doing well. But times are woefully hard, sir. The country is not what it was, and I don't believe it ever will be again. People don't want to pay their debts—harder and harder every year to find a gentleman. I said just now that I got

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down and came in to warm myself. Didn't I say that, doctor?"

"I think you did."

"Yes, I am quite sure of it," he declared, scratching his head. "Yes, I am quite positive. I don't want to deceive anyone and therefore I'm always careful as to my statements. Yes, and I won't deceive you. The fact is that the main object of my visit was not to get warm. I am a straightforward man, sir, and I take advantage of nobody. I came to speak to you on a very serious matter. I have for some time intended to call, but something has kept popping up to prevent it. The fact is, I did call yesterday, but you were not here. So, as I came along to-night I thought it was as good a time as any to stop in. Ah, I don't exactly know how to begin. You'll pardon me if I ruffle your feelings, I hope. Yes, I'm quite sure you will. I have heard, no matter how, that you are paying a great deal of attention to Miss Silvester. No offense, I hope, for she is quite a fine young woman, sir; but I wish to warn you that by right she belongs to me. She snatched the mortgage—or rather the agreement—out of my hand and trampled on it—a most unlawful proceeding, I assure you, but in the eye of all obligation she belongs to me—that is, until all financial demands have been satisfied. You are a gentleman and won't ask me to go into particulars, and no matter what may be the outcome of our talk here to-night, I must ask you to say nothing about what passes between us. I agreed to educate her for her hand in marriage. I kept my word and it now

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remains for her to live up to the promise she made me. I have waited a long time for her; and time don't halt when an old man waits; it keeps right on, faster and faster. But as I said, I understand you are paying attentions to her."

I looked at him for a time in silence and then I said: "Your distress is not hard to understand. But is it a case of jealousy or is it a fear that you may not get your money? I have some respect for jealousy, for that involves the heart, but—"

"But you've got no respect for a man who demands his own if his own happens to be money. Is that it? I tell you, sir, I understand you are trying to marry her. And I warn you. Have I said enough?"

"I leave you to be the judge of that."

"Then I think I have. But you haven't said enough; you haven't said anything."

It might have been cruel, but I rather enjoyed his affliction. He thrust his sharp face toward me, and his eyes glittered in their boring attempt to probe my mind. He began to work his mouth, a striking reminder of an old and weather-beaten goat, and I let him chew his acrid quid till he swallowed it, and then I said, still finding it sweet to withhold a positive assurance: "Someone seems to know more of my affairs than I do."

"I didn't come in here to juggle, doctor. I want you to understand that."

"You came to get warm, and find that you are hot."

"It's enough to make a man hot!" he cried. "Put yourself in my place, and—"

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"God forbid," I interposed.

His eyes snapped like an ape's, and like an old ape he reached up as if to find a bar hanging above him. He settled down, but anger burned like a brimstone light in his eyes, and I thought that had he the nerve he could be one of the worst men living.

"You could be in a much worse place than mine, Dr. Hudley."

"But I wouldn't knowingly put myself there."

"You wouldn't? I am a gentleman, sir."

"You may believe it."

"If you question it, sir, I will call you out. My father was a gentleman."

"Not impossible," I agreed.

He began to soften. "I want to know what you are going to do."

"You spoke of calling me out. I am going out with you."

"That was a slip. We are not living in the old days of honor. I beg your pardon. But I am really in distress."

"Over your money?"

"Who said anything about money? Can't you think of anything but money? I want to know, sir—and I will take your word for it—if you intend to marry Miss Silvester in case she gives her consent?"

"It is not likely that I could marry her without her consent. You didn't, and you say you had a mortgage on her. And I suppose that if I should marry her you could have me arrested for removing mortgaged property."

"I didn't say a mortgage. I said agreement. You

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are juggling again. Now tell me, please, for I am an old man and maybe a little childish—tell me if it is your wish to marry her."

"It is not."

The muscles of his face relaxed. He took a long breath as if he had reached the top of a steep hill. "Then, doctor, you ease my mind. Your grandfather and your father were gentlemen. I believe you."

He got up, looked about, opened the door and gazed out. "We are going to have the worst snowstorm for years," he said. "I'd hate to go far tonight."

Just at that moment I heard the big gate open. A figure like a snow-man on a white horse rode up to the door. I was summoned to flounder over the country beyond the old tavern.

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CHAPTER XV.

TAKE ONE.

The snow was damp and heavy, and, building false feet under my horse, exaggerated his height, like a man reared upon the pedantic stilts of pretended learning, never sure of a foundation, ever upon the verge of a stumble. A tallow light, as yellow as a jaundiced eye, shown from the window of the Boyce cottage, and I fancied that I heard the hoarse rasp of the dead gourd vine against the wall. A snow-bowed branch of the chestnut tree on the brow of the hill raked my hat, and I thought of the benighted creature who had knelt there to trick back a truant love. My mind returned to review the scene with old Bethpage, and I remembered that I had felt no surprise at his assertion of the claim upon the teacher. After her story he seemed to have come as a natural following.

My conductor, pleading the excuse of urgency, abandoned the road for a short cut through the timber. In a patch of scrub oak land, the snow-covered saplings stood, children of the woods in their night-gowns, arms up, playing ghost. We crossed the big road, leaving the old tavern to the right, and stumbled down a lane, full of hips and backbones, my guide declared. In the light falling from my door I had seen his long beard, and his dis-

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position not to speak except on the most vital of subjects (the likelihood of a 'coon being in that tree, or here's where the dog killed a polecat, about five years ago) led me to believe that he must be a sage among his people. At his house a number of neighbors were praying over an old woman, dying. For more than half a century she had "grannied" to the community, launching tentative ships of life, and it had been the boast of her friends that her days, or more properly her nights, had been devoted to the saving of doctors' bills.

"Are you goin', doctor?" said my guide, as I arose to leave the room.

"Yes. I am not needed here. Tell someone to get my horse."

"All right, he's hitched right out there. I didn't have him put up, for I didn't know that it would be any use. Can she understand what we are sayin' now? I don't want to hurt her feelin's. But I come to the notion this mornin' that old age had her, and there ain't no medicine that can pull us out when age gits us. But I don't want to hurt her feelin's, you know, for she's lived at my house a long time, and I'd like to be certain that she can't understand me before I speak my mind."

"She is dead," said I. And the neighbors who had hung back from the bed in awe of a doctor's skill, now pressed forward, the women in lamentation, the men silent. My guide followed me out to the fence. "Wait a moment," he said, when I had mounted. "I want to sorter square myself with you. I've got a good deal of confidence in the grip

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old age lays on a body, and I knowd there wan't no use in sendin' for you away off there through the snow, but the women folks would have their way. I hope you don't blame me, for as I say I've got a good deal of respect for the grip of old age."

I gave assurance that no blame was attaching to him, whereupon in his gratitude he offered to ride home with me, but I waved off his generosity.

"But wait jest a moment," said he. "I reckon you don't recollect me. Don't you remember meetin' me the day you come back to this country? It was over yonder on the ridge, and you wanted to know the way to the old Hudley place, and I told you I hadn't lived here long enough to risk an opinion."

"Yes, I remember. But you appear to have found the way to-night. So you are the same man?"

"Putty much, but not exactly the man I was then. I've had the rheumatiz since and it sorter fetched me a little. I would have made myself knowd as I come along, but I kept on puttin' it off, and besides my beard has growed a good deal since then and I didn't want to shock you. Yes, I found my way over there all right to-night. The fact is a feller can go to a place straighter than he can give directions. I am sorter against giving directions. The more directions you give the bigger liar you are made out when the traveler goes wrong, and nine chances to one he will go wrong. You recollect about a horse I wanted to swop."

"I believe you did say something about a horse."

"I'm putty certain I did. Well, old Granny's gone and we can't help it, and all the tears that ever oozed

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out of the eyes of the human family won't fetch her back, and all the noise made by all the wars wouldn't make her fret in her sleep. Therefore, I say, let the affairs of this life go on—not in a want of respect for her, you understand, but because it would be foolish to try to stop 'em. So, if you'll hop off and go with me to the barn I'll show you that horse now—single-footer, all gaits, and as gentle as a dog; could have swopped him a dozen times, but I sorter felt in duty bound to give you a chance at him. I never forget a promise, even if I make it so fur down under my breath that no one hears it—big nostrils, white star in the forehead. My name is Al Pryor, cousin of the Pryor that wan't beat but by three votes for sheriff. That's the sort of a man that's talkin' to you, and the horse's right out there in the barn, good teeth and big frog in the foot."

In the house a woman privileged by age, accredited nearness to the tomb, was chanting the virtues of the departed one. Pryor continued his harangue, and in my ears were at once the distressful wailings of a dirge and the sharp notes of a horse-trader's clack; and I was whimsical enough to sit there and listen, so weird and grotesque, so unlike any of my former experiences, so reminiscent of the stories told by my father. Pryor had no notion that his keenness to swop horse for horse was at this wailing time a lack of respect for the dead; his blunt philosophy told him that Old Granny was beyond all molestation; shrewdness prompted him to act while opportunity lay within his range.

"He's out there now just achin' to be rid by a

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doctor—never knowd to jump a fence or break a bridle-rein. What do you say?"

"I say good-night."

"But don't cut a man off in the prime of his hankerin'. It won't take long. Why, if I had knowd this, doctor, I wouldn't have fetched you. And besides, I didn't let 'em put your horse in the barn; I didn't want to trap you. Are you gone? Well, we never know the day nor the hour when they slip away from us."

Looking back through the falling snow, I saw him standing in the firelight, moping in sorrow among the mourners.

I did not attempt a brush-land cut-off, but decided to follow the big road as long as it lay in my direction; and as I came within light-shine of the old tavern, a formless thought of Glich arose in my mind. I dismounted and tied my horse under a shed. For the most part the rambling old house was dark, but a light streamed from a low window, the bar-room, and from within issued the discordant notes of revelers. Glich was among them. He sprung up from his chair in front of the fire and clutched my hand. He had been drinking, but his eye was steady and his voice firm. I requested him to ride with me.

"All right, I will in a few minutes, as soon as you get warm. There's no rush. I want you to know my friends here—best fellows in the world. Here, boys."

He introduced several young men and several old fossils, ancients of the woods, hangers-on at the bar,

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sap-suckers of whisky; and with an unction inspired by hot drinks on a cold night, they urged me to make myself at home and to call for anything I wanted. One old fellow whom they addressed as Fox-Trot Lewis, and who appeared to be the comedian of the party, remarked that they had come near having some sure-enough fun. "Dave Hite and Glich, there," he said, grinning. "They let fly some putty sharp words, and—"

"That's enough," said Glich.

"I just wanted to tell him about it."

"Well, you just shut up."

"Oh, I can do that, too, on a pinch. He's comin' back, boys."

A tall man with his trousers stuffed in the tops of his high-legged boots came striding into the room. His countenance was sour. No one introduced him to me; all gave him the timid respect of silence, all save Glich, and he gave him silence, but with a cold look in which there was no respect. Fox-Trot winked at a neighbor, edged up to a cheese on the end of the bar, gouged out a mouthful with a rusty knife sticking there, and shrugged as if prepared for any sort of sport. The sour man ordered a drink. He turned about with his elbows resting on the bar and surveyed the company. "It's Dave Hite," a man whispered to me.

"I don't know that I'm called on to go away and leave you fellers here to enjoy yourselves," said Hite. "I've never run from no man yet. Glich, come have a drink."

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"No," said Glich, his voice sounding as if he followed a tuning-fork to catch a bass pitch.

"Well, you needn't be so short about it."

"I told you a while ago that I didn't want to have anything more to say to you."

Hite's eyebrows rose up like the humping of an angry cat. "Yes," said he, "but what you tell and what I think may be two different things. You tried to raise a row with me just now when your liquor was a little gamer than it is now."

"I tried to avoid a row with you. Didn't I boys?" No one said a word, though Glich looked from one to another.

"I said you tried to raise one," Hite persisted.

"Yes, I know what you said."

"You do. And there's another thing you ought to know, and it's this—no man ever called me a liar and lived. Do you know that?"

"I know," said Glich, a smile like a white cord parting his lips, "that Sam Patton called you a liar in this room not long ago—and my friend, Dr. Hudley, here, got to him just before he died. You got off on the plea of self-defense. They all do."

Hite looked at me, his eye sharp and evil. But he gave me merely a glance, Glich claiming his attention.

"He didn't live, did he?"

"If he ain't dead he was buried alive," said Glich.

"And yet you stand there and call me a liar."

"No, I haven't called you a liar," Glich replied.

"You did, and you are a sneaking cur and a black-tongued liar."

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There was a shuffling of feet. I took quick hold of Glich's arm. I thought of his mother—of his father going down into the meadow to look for the sheep. He gently put my hand away. Whispers went about the room. "I never thought he'd take that," came through the thick of an old fossil's breath.

"A black-tongued liar," Hite repeated. "And before I'd take that I'd get down and wallow with the hogs and acknowledge myself the filthiest one in the lot. Oh, don't try to walk away. You've got to stand there and take it. You've been courtin' death for some time—you've been talkin' about me."

"I said you ought not to have killed Sam."

"And what right have you got to go round sayin' what I ought not to have done? You are a low-flung coward and a liar; and now I'm through with you."

He turned to take his drink. Glich whispered to me: "Stand where you are and say nothing if you are my friend." Then aloud his voice rose. "No, you ain't quite through. But wait a minute. There's no hurry. What we do must be done without a rush."

He had walked down to the end of the bar. He plucked the rusty knife out of the cheese, opened his own and placed two knives on the bar, handles toward Hite. "Hear what I've got to say, Dave Hite, and then help yourself to one of them. Not much of a showing, but they're the best I could do under the circumstances. I reckon mine is the sharpest. You fellows stand right where you are. You stood for him and you've got to stand for me. Dave Hite, you are a bully, a coward, a cut-throat

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and a liar with the tongue of a snake. Help yourself to a knife."

There was a murmur, a hard breathing and a movement of feet, but not a word was spoken. It seemed to me that I had lost my power of speech and motion, fascinated by the scene.

"Help yourself."

Hite shoved back his glass of liquor. He shifted his weight from one leg to the other. He touched a knife and drew back his hand with a jerk as if stung. He cleared his throat.

"This will mean the death of both of us, Glich."

"Don't call me Glich. Take a knife."

Hite leaned heavily on the bar. His knees shook. He looked up, with his head far back, and his slouch hat fell to the floor. He did not stoop to get it. He tried to speak. Twice he broke down.

"Mr. Radshaw, I—I haven't got the nerve. I thought I had, but I haven't. I'm done. I've been done ever since I let my place go—it was mortgaged and I didn't—didn't get a great deal for it. Now I'm broke and got no nerve. I was drunk when I killed Sam. The boys and the law know he stabbed me first. More than a hundred times I've wished he'd stabbed me last. No, I've got no nerve. I'm broke, and when a man ain't got a dollar, he ain't got a very strong hold on his nerve. I heard that Sam's wife wanted to go off to her folks. She had no money; folks had raised some for her, but she wouldn't take it. She said she wouldn't beg. I sold my place and paid off the mortgage, and then I took the rest of the money, sixty dollars, and went

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over to her house. I knowd she wouldn't take it from me, so I hid behind a tree till she went down to the spring, and then I slipped in and put the money on the table, with a brick-bat on it, with a piece of paper writ on that a man that owed Sam left it. I got away without her seein' me, and the next day she went off to her folks. Yes, sir, I'm broke and got no nerve."

He bowed his head upon the bar and sobbed—a bully crushed, a man crying. Glich had stood speechless.

"No money, Dave. Broke?"

"No money and no nerve—all gone."

"Haven't you got folks somewhere, Dave? Couldn't you go to them and begin life over again?"

"Yes, if I could get to 'em, but I can't."

"Dave—" I saw his hand on the sobbing man's shoulder. "Dave, we used to be good friends. You and I stood together once and whipped the Jenkins boys. And we used to divide things at school; and if it wasn't for whisky your heart would be all right. Let's not touch any more of the stuff, Dave. I won't; it has come near costin' us our lives this night. I won't touch another drop. Are you with me, Dave?"

"Too—too late for me, Glich. I'm done."

"No, it's not too late, Dave. You go off to your folks—"

"Sam's blood, Glich?"

"Do as my father does, Dave. Pray. I don't know that you can at first, but you can learn. I

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have been prayed for a thousand times and I believe it is going to do some good. My mother has kept father from killing men, way back yonder—kept him back with her prayers. There must be something in it. Yes, go to your folks. I can help you. I sold some walnut logs to-day and I've got a hundred and sixty dollars. I didn't expect it; didn't need it. Take half of it. We used to gather the walnuts from under these same trees. Here."

We moved in silence toward the bar. In silence we saw him divide the money and put half into Hite's nerveless hand. They looked at each other. "The fellow that don't remember what happened a long time ago ain't much of a man, Dave. Now don't cry—it's all right. Doctor, let's ride."

We went out together, neither of us speaking. I mounted and waited for his horse to be brought from the stable. I saw Hite come out, walking like a man who had grasped a new purpose. Silently we rode toward home. The snow was falling faster. "When I used to come from the tavern I'd slip in," said Glich, "but to-night I'm going to wake mother —and she'll believe me. Right down yonder in the holler is where I keep my hounds. They didn't want 'em about the house at home, so I let a negro out here keep 'em for me."

"Glich, you are a rebuke to the over-enlightened man who says that the heart is dead; that selfish motives move all the world."

"Oh, I don't know about that. Dave's all right when he's at himself. I don't know much of

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life, but I believe there's some little good in everything, if we look for it in the right way."

As we drew near to the house we came upon Old Luke with a sheep in his arms.

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CHAPTER XVI.

NOT AT LIBERTY TO TELL, BUT TOLD.

The next day was bright and cold. A wagon on the road creaked the tune of the North. Dogs met, and instead of bristling scampered in fun. An old cow cut a calfish caper in the barn-yard. A plow-horse galloped up to the fence and halted suddenly with a loud snort, the light of burlesque in his eyes. From the white hill came the shout of the rabbit-hunting boy. On the dead branch of a tree sat a dove, with the purple glow of a far-away summer on her back. Through the low-bending boughs of the under-bush oaks I could see the vapor rising from the spring. Luke walked about, gazing into the tops of the snow-laden trees. From the kitchen came a song of happiness; an old woman's heart was overflowing. Miss Silvester tapped on the window-pane and I joined her in the sitting-room.

"You are too late for breakfast," she said, as I sat down.

"I received a call about daylight and ate breakfast abroad."

"A case of croup?" she asked.

"No, a broken arm. One of the tavern fossils fell from his horse."

She looked at me with an air of disappointment. "If it hadn't been for the snow, it might have been

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his neck, mightn't it? Snow is clean and beautiful, but it has its disadvantages. It's impracticable, at times."

"I thought you'd be at school by this time," said I.

"You did? I must give you a calendar. This is Saturday. Listen to the old woman's song," she said, turning her head toward the kitchen.

"Do you suppose you'll ever be that happy?" I asked.

She shook her head. "It was a long road of trouble, and she thinks she has reached the end. There may be a bright sunset over yonder, but I don't want to trudge through miles and miles of mire to see it. The miry way is too long, and the sunset is too short."

"Have you seen Glich this morning?" I inquired.

"Yes, at breakfast. I think he's off now trying to beat a man in a horse trade. Tell me about the trouble last night."

I told her, and she slowly rocked herself, thinking; she smiled and her eyes snapped. "I knew he was game," she said. "But would you have stood there and looked at a fight with knives?"

"Yes. Out West a fight is done in a flash. Last night it was a matter of studied deliberation. In its slowness there was a sort of charm. Yes, I would have looked on. I couldn't have got away."

"Did you ever kill a man?"

"Not with a knife."

"With a pistol?"

"Out West we called it a gun."

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"Did he insult you?"

"Oh, no."

"Then why did you kill him?"

"He shot me."

"Oh. And when you see him in your dreams—"

"I shoot him again. He was a bully—a murderer."

"What did the authorities do?"

"They offered to appoint me town marshal."

She leaned back and looked for a long time into the fire. "In regard to woman you can always make a shrewd guess," she said. "But we never know what a man has done."

"And we never know what a woman may do."

She looked at me with snapping eyes. "Her great crime comes of love."

"Yes. But what do you want me to say? Dispute it?"

She laughed. "I was rather in hopes you would. After all, it's only the trivial matter that strikes an argument out of you. Did Glich say anything about me as you rode home, last night?"

"No. He was silent nearly all the way."

"Didn't he speak at all? You said silent nearly all the way. He wasn't silent the full stretch of the road. What did he say?"

"He spoke of his hounds."

She made a face at me. I thought of old Bethpage, and his name rolled down my tongue, but I caught it up with a tilt and rolled it back into silence, remembering his injunction to mention nothing that might pass between us.

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"What were you going to say?" she asked.

"Nothing," I answered, with a dry cough in the air.

"Nothing? We don't choke back nothing. Tell me, please."

"I was thinking of Miss Boyce."

"No, you were not. Tell me, please."

"Well, then, I was thinking of Bethpage."

"What were you thinking about him? Something he said? Have you seen him?"

"Yes, I have seen him. I saw him the day I came to this place."

"But you have seen him since then—recently. Did he mention me? What did he say? I think you are mean not to tell me, and after I've told you so much, too. I wouldn't treat you that way; I really wouldn't. What did he say to you?"

"I am not at liberty to tell," is what a fool would have replied, and it is what I said.

"Then why did you tell me that you'd seen him? Was my almost boundless confidence deserving of such treatment?" She pouted; and then, glozing my honor with the recollection that I had made no definite promise to Bethpage, I told her of the old fellow's visit, and she laughed till the room rang with wild music.

"It's just like the old skinflint never to think of Glich," she said. "No matter how Quakerish in dress a man may be, there is a good deal of fear mixed up in his contempt for good clothes. And when an old fool imagines himself in love, a necktie is of more weight than an idea. But then father

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Bethpage has no idea except of economy. He is economical enough to call himself pious. Is it a kindred narrowness that drives a miser to a creed? Are all misers pious? Piety. The word always brings up cold knuckles and a blue nose—breaking the ice in the water pitcher at morning."

She rocked herself, shooting a glance at me out of the spear-point corner of her eye.

"As to misers, any person in this community is prepared to instruct me," said I. "In the West the miser is not known. He is the inheritance of an older civilization."

"Really? I can see, doctor, that you are getting just a little tired of these old fogies. Honest, now, don't you regret having come back?"

I answered with an energy that must have left no doubt as to my sincerity. I assured her that I had reached an age when the calm eye of thoughtful man surveys the field in search of happiness. I had realized that for me there was no startling conquest, not even a distinctive place to be won. I wanted to look forward no farther than a day. I wanted each week to be summed up as a complete contentment. Ambition was a disease of the nerves. My nerves were sound. She said that I took a dead-level view of life. If I desired the weeks to be the same in contentment, with nothing new, no jar of unexpectedness, then why should I care for many weeks? The cutting out of a hundred weeks could make no significant difference. It was her dream to do something. She felt the jab of envy every time she saw a woman's picture in a magazine. It

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was her desire to be talked about, her longing to be admired for something done. She would gladly go forth as a yellow-fever nurse—anything. And with some such end in view she had bent herself to study. Knowledge was not its own reward, like prudish virtue with thin lips sealed. With her, a book offered satisfaction to the appetite of hungry revenge; she grew tired of it, but like a wolf gorged after appetite had been appeased—always with the view of future utility. A thought hidden away in the carcass of an uninviting book might some day prove an arrow-head, and therefore she searched for it. I asked if she had ever thought of the stage as a career. She had seen but few plays. Yes, her restless eye had been turned upon the stage as an escape from drudgery. The actresses whom she had seen were disappointing, wanting in force; they had appeared nerveless. She had felt a tingling to spring upon the boards and snatch the words out of their tea-cooling mouths. One of these days she would cast about for something to do, but she was not free to go away till she had paid Bethpage.

Glich came stamping at the door. As he entered she dropped him a silent permission and he sat down between us. She asked if he had found his man.

"I wasn't looking for a man," he said, glancing at me, and then at her. "My mind don't run on man all the time—wish it did come nearer. You look as bright this morning as a ripe red haw. The doctor must have pleased you."

"He has—by letting me talk,"

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"That's a good deal the way with him, I have found out. I don't know whether he listens or not, but he keeps pretty close of mouth as long as other folks show signs of wanting to say anything. And does it always please you for a man to let you talk? If it does, go ahead, and I'll sit here till sundown. But you don't talk so much when I'm around. How is it you don't have anything to say to me, lately?"

"One of man's greatest influences is to inspire silence," she said.

He thrust forth his chin and bleated like a calf.

"Do you stop at that?" she asked. "Really, I expected something stronger, though of course nothing more natural."

"And you ought to have something stronger, I'll tell you that. You always grab something out of a book and shove it at me. When I talk to you I want to know what you think, not what somebody else has said."

"But really, Glich, you won't let me think. You whack me over the head."

"I don't do any such of a—thing. What makes you want to rile a fellow?"

"Glich, you present a strange anomaly."

"A what? But go ahead."

"A man not afraid of man, and fearless with woman. We would naturally expect to find some sign of timidity in one direction or the other."

"You would? Well, the good Lord would have to make me over again, that's all. I'm not afraid of a man, and I can't be afraid of a woman. But do you

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know that I haven't seen you alone for weeks? Why do you keep out of my way?"

"Do I?" she looked up with a suck of the lips.

"Yes, do I? You know it as well as I do. And I'm tired of it, too."

"Can't you realize that you are not alone with me now?"

"That's all right. The doctor knows what I think. I'm tired of being pulled and hauled about by the ring in my nose. I've told you a thousand times that I'm sore."

"Have you a ring in your nose?"

"Listen at that. Have I? You ought to know. You put it there. And I stood like a blamed fool till you welded the hot iron—stood there like a steer licking salt."

She leaned over and put her hand on his arm and he shook like a tree in a strong wind—shook and freed himself from her electric touch. "Don't talk that way," she said. "Let us be friends."

"Friends! Can a man be friends with a fever? Does he want to curry favor with a disease that's got him down?"

"But he might want to cure the disease, Glich," said I. "And you can't successfully fight a disease by storming at it."

Luke came in to tell Glich that he was going to ride, a term for going abroad or returning home. "Mother devises against it," he said, "but I must go. I let old Sanderson have Lady's money. The time's up, and I'm going to put it in a safer place. I understand he's been speculating, and I don't

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like that; so I'm going to call on him to-day. It's the only money that ever worried me. Doctor, are you going to ride?"

"No. I'm going to walk over to Miss Polly's."

"Well, don't mention anything about Lady's money. I'd have to explain to Miss Polly, and that would take about a week."

He wrapped a woolen scarf about his neck and took his leave. Miss Silvester arose and went to the window. "I don't think this is at all a bad day," she said. "It's full of life—a day that belongs to another climate. Doctor, I believe I'll walk over with you."

Glich jumped back in his chair. "The deuce you say. Well, not unless you're stronger than I am, and I don't believe you are."

"Oh, isn't he delightful!" she cried, wheeling about with a clap of hands. "You are charming, my dear Glich, and really I can't leave you. So, doctor, I fear you'll have to go alone."

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CHAPTER XVII.

PLAYED WITH HER.

I found Miss Polly, with her head tied up, sweeping a path to the gate. She was talking to herself, complaining of the snow. She cried out in great surprise as I came up, and struck at me with her broom.

"Gracious alive, I thought the Yankees were comin' sure enough," she exclaimed, leaning on her broom to pant. "They used to come every time there was a snow, it appeared like. And then, of all the barkin' of dogs and squawlin' of chickens, it took the lead. Walk right in. I recollect that once as rascally a lookin' feller as I ever seen tried to grab a settin' hen off her nest in a box by the kitchin fire, and she bit him like a rattlesnake. And I told him that a mad dog had pizened her, and he believed it. I told him I'd tie up his hand for him, but it wouldn't do much good. Well, I never saw sich a grin on a human bein's face. He was a furriner, and his face was as big as an ordinary punkin; and laws a massy, he struck a trot, prayin' fitten to kill hisse'f. Wait just a moment," she said, as we reached the doorstep. "Lady is in one of her moods. Oh, I've got that word the same as if I had it corked up in a bottle, haven't I? And I'm much obliged to you for givin' it to me, I can

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tell you that, as we go along. She's Barbara now, and you mustn't call her Lady—her doll's Lady. I don't think she'll know you. In her mind, a little boy named Davy comes to play with her. I'll tell her you are Davy."

She opened the door and cried, "Davy's come, Barbara." The girl jumped up from her rag doll, in a corner, and came running to me. Her face was so childlike that I could hardly believe she had not lost some of her womanly proportion. She took me by the hand and led me to her playhouse, where a board was spread with a cloth and set with bits of broken dishes.

"Don't make any noise, Davy," she said. "Lady is asleep, and you mustn't wake her. She didn't sleep a wink last night, and she coughed all the time. Now you must play like you are the doctor."

I got down on my knees and played with her. Old Miss Polly sat by the fire rocking, and, for a wonder, was silent. She looked at me, and sadly shook her head.

"How long has Lady been sick?" I asked.

"Oh, ever so long. She fell off the bluff into the creek, and when they got her out she was most drownded. Now we must play like we're eating. Come, dinner's ready, doctor. Sit down over there, please. We haven't anything fit to eat. The bread wouldn't bake, and the coffee's awful bad."

I caught the old woman's eye. She was laughing and crying, an old smile and a new tear.

"Don't take any of that butter, for I know it ain't good. Law me, butter ain't what it was in my day."

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"Who is that?" I asked, pointing to Miss Polly.

"Oh, she's a poor old lady I'm taking care of. But she won't eat because nothing is good enough for her. She hasn't eaten anything since the war —nothing has been good enough since then. There, Lady is awake. Don't cry, for the doctor has come to see you, and will make you well."

She took up the semblance of a doll and caressed it. "The creek was awful cold, yes it was. Now you must give her the medicine. But I don't feel like playing, Davy. I've been playing all day. You won't get mad at me if I go and lie down, will you?"

She went to her room. I asked how long she had been in that state.

"Mood, you mean," the old woman corrected me. "Since last night, and she's coming out of it now, I think. Her child moods get shorter. They used to last for several days at a time. Come, sit down by the fire. Oh, they had a fine time over at the tavern last night, didn't they? You can't keep anything from me, and you needn't try. How did I know? Oh, I found out. Just about daylight old Fox-Trot Lewis stopped in to get warm, and he told me all about it. Triflin' old scoundrel, I told him I wished he'd froze to death, with his titter and snort, a carousin' around the neighborhood. I do think we've got the no-accountest set of men folks these days I ever set eyes on. And so Glich made Hite knock under. Oh, he's full of Old Luke and full of Old Nick, too, for that matter. And I told old Lewis to warm himself as quick as he could, or

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I might be tempted to set the dogs on him. It would have been a good thing if they had fit and both got killed. Law, me. Now you sit right where you are, and I'll slip out and get a bite to eat."

"Look here, madam, every time I come I drive you to the kitchen. You sit right where you are. I don't want anything to eat."

She cleared her throat. "Dr. Hudley, when the Lord appoints you to regulate my affairs, he'll tell me as soon as he will you. I cooked before you was born, and for your father, at that, and I heard no complaint from him, and I don't want to hear any from you, nuther."

It was of no use to protest, and I bowed my head in submission. She commended my meekness with a soft look, and began to bestir herself. And while she was busy with preparations for the meal, dodging in and out of the room, fussing at an old cupboard in the corner, rattling spoons in the kitchen, I sat turning the leaves of Lady's school book, a worn reader with the taut cords of Byron and the great muscles of Shakespeare running through it. When dinner was ready, she began the accustomed deprecation of her table, but the vision of Lady playing with the broken dishes, echoing the household lament, must have swept past her mental eye, for she broke a word in two, spread her hands upon the table, looked at me, and laughed.

"But don't you laugh at me," she said, striving to sober her face. "Don't you dare, for I won't put up with it. I've done nuthin' all my life but let

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people laugh at me, and I'm tired of it. Do you hear me?"

I said that I did, and then inquired as to how long Lady was likely to sleep.

"She may wake up at any minute."

"Then I'll wait awhile. I'll take a tramp in the woods, across the creek, see a patient, and come back."

"Very well, sir, if you're in a hurry to leave my house. Oh, don't let snow or nothin' else hold you back."

"But I have a patient."

"So you said," she replied, and bowed, mockingly. "And for gracious sake don't let me keep you. No man ever left his garment in the hands of Polly Billings, Billings that is and Rainright that was. I'll tell you that. And no, you needn't blink at me, nuther. Patient, such weather as this? What sort of animal is it? I'd like to know that."

"Old Mrs. Strang. She was taken down night before last."

"What, and didn't send me word? Well, that's cool, I must say. And all sorts of ignorant folks a settin' up with her, I reckon. Bless me, I thought I knowd everything that happens, but I don't. They are tryin' to keep things from me, these days. Well, you jest wait, and I'll kill a couple of chickens and send 'em over there. And I've got a new blanket that I'll send, too. And you tell old Abner Strang I'll box his jaws the very next time I see him. Now, I wonder if they've got any sugar and

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coffee? It's jest like Ab to be caught with nothin in the house, fetch-take him."

"They appear to have plenty of everything," I made haste to assure her.

"It's precious little you know about it," she snapped. "Now you jest set down in there till I get you ready to go."

She loaded me down, and stood in the door shouting at me as I trudged off into the woods. It was nearly night when I returned. Through the red curtain at the window I saw the dancing shadows of the fire. I rapped, and Lady opened the door.

"Oh, it's Mitford," she cried, a heart-gladness leaping to her eyes. "Come in. Mammy said you were here while I was asleep. I don't call you Little Mitford any more, do I? You ain't little. Now you sit here, and I'm going to sit down by you. I've been asleep so long—and I dreamed, and wondered if I'd ever wake up. I dreamed of you, Mitford; and I said to the great something that makes dreams, 'if you let him stay with me all the time you needn't wake me.'"

She put her hands in mine and looked affectionately into my eyes. "I dreamed I was a little girl and you a little boy—but when I woke I was so glad that you were a great big man that I said I wouldn't call you little any more. Are you any kin to me?"

"I think not. Why?"

"Because I want to kiss you. Would it be wrong to kiss you anyway?"

"No," I cried. "In the sight of God, no."

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"Why, Mitford, you scare me when you talk like that."

I drew her to me—I hushed her with a kiss, and I could have shouted at the touch of her innocent lips. A holy emotion, like a religion, poured over my heart, and I bowed my head.

"Oh, Mitford, it makes you cry. Don't, please. But it makes me cry, too. What is it, precious, that makes us cry? It is God. Oh." She put her head upon my breast and wept.

The old woman called from an upper room and she hastened away, this loved one of Christ, this essence that had given me a new birth, made me a convert to the only religion, love—love so pure that it must have come like the spirit of the Crucified One. And I stood up a new man, the world aglow from the lamp in my heart.

The old woman and the girl came down together, the old led by the young. "I love Mitford," she said.

"Lord bless the child, what is she talkin' about? Of course you do, my dear. We all love Mitford —loved his father and his beautiful mother, and if there ever was a lady she was one, with a kind word for everybody and manners like a queen. Yes, you sit over there by Mitford, and I'll sit here, but you mustn't bother him. Now, sir, how did you find old Mrs. Strang?"

"She's much improved."

"Well, she'd better be, I'll tell you that. And what did she say about the things I sent her?"

"She declared that they came just in time. The fact is, they were not prepared for sickness."

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"Oh, she did? And who is prepared for sickness, I'd like to know? And yet you would have poked off over there empty-handed. Laws a massy, how forgetful folks are, these days. But I must see about supper."

"I declare, Miss Polly, you'll founder me. I must go right now—I must ride across the country."

"Look a here, don't you Miss Polly me. I know exactly what my duty is, and I'm going to do it, ride or not ride. But somebody might be in need of you, so go on. Goodness knows, I don't want to stand in nobody's way. But don't you dare to say, sir, that I turned you out of my house hungry. Now, go on with you."

At the door I kissed the girl good-night, and went forth into the cold air to find a summer garden, sweet with the scent of the rose.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

AN OLD MAN'S FEAR.

A warm wind blew from the southwest before the turning of the night and a thaw came with the morning. The sun beat upon the flinching snow and the hillside gully gargled its muddy throat. I had ridden far, and did not reach home till the flashing day was far advanced. The negro boy who took my horse said that Luke and his wife were gone to church. Glich had ridden to town with Dave Hite, who was now on his way to a distant part of the state. I sat down in my office to read a new treatise on insanity. And I looked up to find Miss Silvester standing at the open door.

"Don't let me break into your study, doctor, but everybody has left the place and I feel like an outcast."

"Come in, and be no longer an outcast. And if you have broken my study, it was the breaking of a dull lesson with a bar of music."

"Oh, what can I say after that? Graceful hands—bar of music. Really, you make me sluggish with sweets. But you don't mean anything you say to me, except when you take me to task," she added, sitting down upon a chair which I placed for her where the sunlight fell upon the floor. "Do you mean any of those pretty things you say to me? Really, do you?"

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She was ready to fence, for she looked at me with a scimitar smile.

"We mean some part of almost everything we say," I replied.

"Some part of almost everything—satisfactory, I must say. But what has happened to you? There is something new in your eyes, something I never saw there before—so tender that your bantering words seem strangely to belie you. Have you been gazing into sweet countenances? Or perhaps you have caught the reflection of the first light in a baby's eyes."

"You can teach the children to read, and you can give me lessons in flattery," said I, with a bow that was not all mockery.

"Oh, can I? How many accomplishments you do impute to me? And you haven't hinted at my weakness in giving up my walk through the woods with you yesterday."

"Was it a weakness? I didn't suppose you wanted to go."

"It was cowardice. I was keen to go, but my master commanded me."

"Then you acknowledge him your master?"

"Oh, yes. I am his slave—not abject as yet, but fitful."

"Have you acknowledged your bondage — to him?"

"I have bowed to his yoke. He put it on my neck, and I smiled as I heard the spring snap. It is securely fastened, and he rode off this morning with a barbarian's war song, the Viking."

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"But do you mean that you've really agreed to marry him?"

"We are engaged, and six months from now I shall dismiss my school and darn his socks."

"And your obligation to old Bethpage?"

"Will be settled by then."

"You surprise me. But you are a woman."

"Do they hang up sentences in the West to let them dry? I have read of jerked beef. Do they jerk sentences and make platitudes of them? I told you I admired him; and his affair with Hite settled it. I couldn't hold out against that gracious force." She sighed, and looked at me. "Our engagement is to be a secret."

"When? How soon?"

"Why, now. It became a secret from the moment of my telling it. But really, it is to be kept close. The old people must learn it only by absorption—yet awhile."

"Poor little Mattie Boyce," said I.

"Yes," she sighed, "but it's not my fault. And it's of no use for me to waste sympathy. She won't let me be sorry for her, and what can I do? I went to see her yesterday. Of course I didn't tell her anything. And how spiteful she was. Her mother went out of the room and the precious kitten began to spit at me. I don't think you could have seen her and kept up your sympathy. She's a little beast, and I've washed my hands of her."

She took off her gloves and rubbed her hands together, and I saw my promise to the little girl wither like the dead vine on the wall. She put on

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her gloves, her hands washed of the "little beast," and gave me a full view of her eyes, demurely innocent. She hoped that I had not been disappointed in her character. Perhaps she had shown weakness, but to Miss Boyce she had done no intentional wrong. There had been a scuffle with circumstances and the girl had been thrown down, but whose fault was it? Surely Glich was not to blame, except for the foible of engaging himself to her. If his heart had changed, he could not be held accountable. Hearts changed every day. The mind ripened, and why should not a heart undergo a change? It was all a growth, a development, and nature was not to be criticised by her children.

Luke and his wife drove through the gate, loud in argument over the sermon; and shortly afterward when we sat down to dinner, they were still at it. The preacher had called up the red fires of torment to make his sermon glare. He had said that many a man was content to go along, believing himself Christian enough finally to land on his feet among the chosen, but perdition's jaws were wide open. This life was but a training-school for the soul, ending with a great commencement day, and woe to the man who had not stood well toward the head of his class.

"I know that he meant that for me," said Luke, helping Miss Silvester's plate. "I know it as well as I know anything, for he looked straight at me, and I won't say it for certain, but I believe he winked."

"Now you know he couldn't have meant you,

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father," his wife protested. "To-day's the first time he ever preached in this neighborhood, and how could he have picked you out? He don't know anything about you."

"Don't you fool yourself," Luke replied, waving a fork. "Somebody has been talking about me—somebody that knows what a struggle I've had. And I wish I could get my hands on him. Doctor, I hate a bushwhacker. I'd rather be shot at by a hundred men I can see than by one lying hid behind a log. Once when I was a candidate for office a man came to my house late at night and called me out. 'I just want to tell you,' said he, 'that I'm your enemy—I'm working against you.' 'Oh, no; you're not my enemy,' I replied. 'I'm not afraid of a man that comes out in the open. You are more of a friend than an enemy, and I want to tell you that if ever you run for office I'll vote for you.' And, sir, I helped to elect that man sheriff."

He fell into silence, and after dinner, still silent, he walked with me down to the office, but when we had sat down speech came to him.

"And the worst of it is, I believe that preacher told the truth. No man ever believed anything stronger than I do in torment after death. Don't you, doctor?"

"I don't believe that in order to maintain a love we must establish a hate," I replied, and he leaned forward with his lips apart. "I don't believe that the Creator found it essential to set up an opposite

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to himself. But thinking men have ceased to discuss such subjects."

"No, they haven't!" the old man cried. "Infidels may make light of the things that harassed the souls of our forefathers—men out in your West—but here in old Tennessee religion is still uppermost in the mind of the human family."

"Religion is well enough; it moves the world. But in the enlightened home the devil no longer frightens the children in their sleep. Mr. Radshaw, don't think me profane, but the touch of a woman's lips sent to my soul the glory of God's love. It is there now, and all the devils in Old Creed's book of terrors could not frighten it."

"I don't know what you mean," he said, almost in a whisper. "I don't understand. Go on."

"No, I've said enough."

"But you haven't said anything to give me a hope. No lips have sent to my soul a love that can't be scared. I tell you, sir, I'm afraid of God's wrath. Night after night I have prayed in the woods, begging for the spirit. But it wouldn't come. And why? It comes to other men. Is every man better than Luke Radshaw? Am I to be shut out? I don't ask the spirit so I may preach. I'm afraid to stand in a pulpit. But I do want to be saved from the wrath. I believe in Christ, but somehow I can't feel that I'm elected."

It was profane, but I wondered if his defeat as a candidate had not a bearing upon his readiness to accept the defeat of his soul.

"I believe there are a certain number to be

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saved," he went on. "I know it—everything teaches it."

"Then God has created souls to damn them?"

"Hah! I don't know—but an angel fell out of heaven—and who created that angel? I know this talk's not agreeable to you; but the trouble comes on me strong at times, and somebody must help me. Old Abner Strang got the spirit. He had gambled and fought—used to keep bull-dogs and fight 'em for money, and on a Sunday. But he joined the church and is perfectly satisfied in the faith. And I know as well as I know anything that he stole government salt during the war. I never stole anything. I've gambled some, and I've been drunk; but I never did a mean thing that I know of. And I never fought without a cause. But good men have fought—David fought. The anointed have always been masterful of spirit, and I don't see why I am to be shut out. When I was a boy I did a thing that I've been sorry for all my life. A preacher came into our house, and I stole his rubber shoes and made a ball out of 'em. I won't say stole—I'll say took. And he told me I was on the road to hell, trotting faster and faster every minute. And it scared me nearly to death. In my sleep I could see sign-boards with fingers pointing; and in my pitiable ignorance I was afraid to walk in a road, not knowing but it might lead me to torment. And I remember that when I went to school for the first time I walked miles out of my way, dodging about to go through woods—and every time I came to a road I'd jump as far across it as I could. But it's not agreeable to you, and I

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won't try to tell you how much I have suffered. Why, sir, long after I was grown I awoke one morning with the smell of the devil's sulphur in my nose."

It was of no use to tell him that environment and temperament were accountable for the perturbation of his soul, and worse than idle would it have been to cite the smile of pity given by the new Christian to the almost revered memory of the dear old personal devil. In liberal advancement he saw a defiant and dangerous infidelity. He was of a time, a generation, and a community that had reared witnesses to the frightful majesty of Beelzebub. Old Aunt Nancy White, as truthful a soul as ever lived, had seen Satan standing in the midst of a frozen pond, the water boiling about his knees. And Jeremiah Lane, brother of the exhorter who wrote the famous tract entitled, "The Gnashing of Teeth," gave testimony that one night during a thunder-storm he had seen the devil hop up and pop his hoofs together three times before touching the ground. The cutting of such a dido was taken as a threat against the neighborhood, and it was a fact that a drouth fell upon the land. The crops withered and the cows went dry. Luke smiled at these absurdities; his judgment told him that the mighty master of darkness had not been seen by human eye, but this fact did not establish his non-existence. Indeed, it made him more to be dreaded.

"No, we won't talk about it," said the old man, getting up and following his habit of standing with his back turned toward the fire. His face was vacant

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and lifeless, the stuffed skin of an animal once powerful. "No, we'll let it go. Oh, by the way, I got Lady's money and took it over to Scottburg, not far over the line in Kentucky, and put it in the bank. Now that's settled. I've been worrying over it; but as soon as we're easy on one point we are uneasy on another, so it don't make much difference what we do or which way we turn. We wanted Glich to marry Mattie Boyce, as true a little woman as ever lived; but he lost his love for her when the teacher came. Understand, I haven't a word to say against Miss Silvester. She's smart, and I reckon she's good-hearted enough; but she's not the woman Mattie is—that is, for Glich. Mattie's no scholar, you understand. But she's tender and loving—and take these qualities away from a woman, and I'd rather have a skeleton standing about the house. Why, sir, many a time when Glich was away that little woman has came over of a cold night to help me feed the cattle—jump up into the loft and fork down the hay. And many a time when we've had no negro in the kitchen she'd come over and wash the dishes and clean up for mother. Of course, such things don't count much with a young fellow that goes about with a ribbon tied around his heart, but they'll mean a good deal when the ribbon begins to fade. We don't say a word. Mother and I've got no complaint to make. The teacher hasn't given us cause to open our mouths, so we trust to time, and that's all we can do. Well," he added, taking his hat from a corner of the mantel-piece where he had hung it upon entering the room, "believe I'll

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knock around and see how things are getting along."

Late at night Glich sang along the road from town. He came into the office with a tune still dribbling from his lips, and grabbing my hand, he gave me a torsion that almost lifted me off the floor, and then he sat down with a sprawl.

"It's all right, doctor. I've undermined her constitution, and her objections have caved in. I was a disease, and she couldn't fight me any longer —she couldn't find any medicine strong enough. Congratulate me."

He reached over and snatched my hand. "Yes, it's all right, and we're to be married in six months from now. She says she'll quit teaching; but I am to let her keep on if she wants to, and I'm to keep on skinning fellows that believe they are better judges of cattle than I am. Oh, it takes a good many licks for the blacksmith to hammer his iron into the shape he wants it, but he keeps at it, and after a while finds his work done. And I've kept at it, I tell you, day and night."

"She'll not keep you gambling now."

He looked at me with his mouth open.

"Well, I hadn't thought of that; but of course she will, she's so full of changes, mostly for the better, and it's a gamble one minute what she'll be the next. We agreed not to tell anybody but you. She told me about old Bethpage, and without saying a thing I walked out of the house and in again. But I left the print of my heels on the oak doorstep. I wanted to take him by the feet and pop him like a whip; but after a while I took the sensible view of

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it and tried to make myself feel thankful that he had put her through school. But, as a matter of fact, he don't deserve any credit—he thought he was doing it all for himself. There was a good deal of talk at the time as to how she got the money to take her away, and the final conclusion was that some of her kin folks had sent it to her. Nobody thought of Bethpage."

"Of course you must have seen her at the tavern long before she went off to school," said I.

"Well, I reckon I did; but somehow I don't recollect her."

"Then old Bethpage was at least a discoverer."

His jaw dropped. "I don't exactly like to hear you say that, doctor. It sounds as if you think he's got more right to her than I have."

"It's not a question of right between you and him."

"Now you're shouting, doctor. Neither one of us has any right except as she grants it. Yes, sir, you shouted that time. But I'm glad he educated her."

"Yes; for otherwise you might never have found her," said I, Mattie Boyce in my mind.

"I don't like that, doctor, and I hope you won't let her get a hint of such a notion. If she gets that into her head, she'll turn it about a time or two and then flirt me overboard."

"Has she acknowledged that she loves you?"

"Well, not as hard as I wanted her to," he said, his countenance darkening. "She'd say 'Ah, hah,' and 'Oh, yes, certainly,' and then catch at something

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else. I wanted to kiss her—tried, and she fought like a cat. And finally she gave me her jaw—pretty enough, and all that, but I wanted to kiss her right dab in the mouth. Yes, it would make me grin, too, if it happened to another fellow."

"She has consented to marry you, but has not acknowledged that she loves you as hard as you wanted her to. Do you know what is the noblest office that poetry exercises upon life? It prevents the marriage of many a man and woman; it demands love first, and then accepts marriage."

"You're roosting too high up in the timber for my small shot, doctor, but I'll try you at a venture. You mean that unless she loves me hard I oughtn't to marry her. And I agree to it all right enough; but now that she's begun to give, she'll give fast. Women don't know where to stop when they begin to give out pieces of the heart. And the first thing you know I'll have it all, warm in my bosom. But I'm keeping you up. I had to stop and tell you. I couldn't help it. And now I'm going to bed to lie there and gamble on what she'll be to-morrow."

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CHAPTER XIX.

AT THE BANKER'S.

Luke must have gone through a reviving season of prayer with his wife, for he met me the next morning with a return of his bubbling humor. At the breakfast table he held me when the rest had quitted the room to tell me a joke, and he clutched me and shook me to enliven my laughter into a pace with his own. His face no longer reminded me of the stuffed skin of a powerful animal—he was the animal come back to life, a great physical force full of kindness, a mellow mind at play with the tender, prankish world. And his eyes were as bright as if they held the vision of Young Happiness, with pink and dimpled feet, dancing beneath the arch of a rainbow. In the sitting-room he took down an old fiddle, and laughingly said he would scratch to the quick the hide of a backwoods tune. I learned that many a time when his soul had groped into the midnight of its trouble he had seized the fiddle to smash it—instrument of the devil—but his wife had always interposed to save the only heirloom of a grandfather who carried psalms in his heart and death in his powder-horn.

"Well, sir," said the old fellow, pausing to screw up his strings, "I'd have to be hungrier than Israel in the wilderness before I'd part with this

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thing. Just look at that color, doctor—softer than the full moon of boyhood. Ah, many a bright eye has seen itself flash into this old box of melodies. And here's a spot—blood! My grandfather was stabbed in the arm by a rival while playing his sweetheart's favorite. He wouldn't scrape it off, so there it is to-day, a drop from the fountain that has trickled away down here through my veins. Here's the tune he was playing."

He sawed a quick-step, an echo of the fiddling deviltry that lived in the past, and when he left off, with a roaring laugh, Glich looked at him a moment and said:

"So that's the tune?"

"That's it. You've heard it many a time."

"No wonder the old man was stabbed."

"Good enough!" Luke shouted, jumping out of his chair and tapping his wife's head with the fiddle. She caught at his hand with a joyous laugh, happy in his happiness and happy in the reformation of her son. She was a quiet woman, a Christian, with a good deed in her right hand, shut from a virtue in her left.

A summons came and I rode away, and all day a picture of their mirth was bright in my mind. I was absent nearly two days, having been called to perform a trying operation in a distant neighborhood, and when I returned, pleased with the strong rally of my patient, Luke met me at the big gate. Once I had mused that he looked like an old lion, cowed; now he was a tiger, with the scent of blood in his nostrils.

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But he was quiet in manner. What I saw was in his eye.

"Don't have your horse put up, doctor. I want you to ride with me. My horse will be here in a minute."

"Has anything gone wrong?"

"Yes. The boy will be here in a moment with my horse. He's coming now; want you to ride with me."

"Something has happened. What is it?"

"I'll tell you in time. Don't ask me now. I've just heard it. Will you go?"

"Yes. I'll go anywhere with you."

He gave me a grateful look, though his eye was fiercely stern, and slowly nodded his head. He did not appear ever to have speculated upon the mystic future. He was all physical, with a coating as hard as a turtle's shell.

The boy brought his horse. We mounted and rode away, he taking the lead in a brisk trot. I caught up with him, and for more than a mile we rode in silence.

"Down this way," he said, and we turned into a lane. "I'll tell you in time. I can't talk about it now. I'm too mad. I'd like to meet the devil, if there is one. I'd never have cause to fear him again. I've just heard it. The wolf! But I'll tell you after a while."

At the end of the lane we turned upon a broad road. He urged his horse to strike a faster gait. Whither could he be leading me, I asked myself time and again. Once he turned about and thanked me

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for my forbearance in not pressing him to tell. At last he began to enlighten me.

"You know I went after Lady's money three days ago. Yes, you know. I took it over to Scottburg and put it in Rutherford's bank. Now I'm going after it."

"Have you heard that it isn't safe?" I asked, wondering why the fact that he was going after the money should compel this urgent trot.

"I have heard that the bank has failed. Don't say a word. Failed three days after taking my money. No, not my money — Lady's money. Robbery—worse than that! Sneak thievery! But we'll see. Rutherford smiled at me when I counted out the money. I remember seeing a speck of gold in his mouth. He said he was glad I thought so well of his institution. I'll tell him now what I think of it. And before I leave he'll know what I think of him. Robbed me with a smile! The man that told me said that women were in the street crying for their money. Think of that, will you? He knew he was going to fail. Then why did he take it? A criminal in the eye of the law? Oh, of course. But he'll not go to prison. He'll law himself out of the clutch of the law. I want to see him. I'm getting over my heat, and I want to see him and tell him about our little girl. Don't say anything. It's no use. Wait."

I did not speak, but my mind was full. I could have told him that my distress over the girl was greater than his own. Like a child she had stolen into my heart, and now like a woman she filled

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it. For days while riding abroad, and at night in my office, I had sorrowed over her, and in my sorrow was a sweetness that made grief pitiable—the memory of her lips and her tears on my breast. Beyond the reach of reason's cooling touch, clouded in mind, she had given her heart to me. Clouded in mind—clouds resplendent with the rays of the sun, darkened by shadows, crimson again, ever changing. And what end could I leap up to see, impatient to gaze over the brow of the hill? Marriage? She could not comprehend its serious obligations. Cure? In my brain the word was constantly fluttering like a bird unable to fly. I had studied many a book, had corresponded with many a specialist, to be told that something might be done, but that time would seem to be her best physician. So, therefore, I must wait, and our love must be as the love of two children. Looking back, I could not settle upon the time when her condition first fell as a blow upon my heart.

Approaching from the west, we saw the town on a hill, with a rugged mantle of snow on the side sloping toward the north, and a broad common of bleached grass on the south. An acquaintance whom we met said that the place was quiet. It was a "legitimate failure," and assurance was given that in time very dollar would be made good.

"Yes, in time," said Luke, as we rode on; "but who is to be the time-keeper—Rutherford? Of course. Legitimate failure! Just as well say that a man was knocked down politely and the money

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gently taken out of his pocket. Well, we'll see how legitimate it was. We'll question him as to his time. We'll ask him how long does he think it will take him to find our little girl's money."

We tied our horses to a rack in the public square, and went forthwith down to the bank. The door was shut. A few idlers hung about, and up and down the pavement slowly paced a man with an air of authority.

"Can't get in. Door's locked," said the man, as we crossed his line.

"Locked," Luke replied. "But I want to see Mr. Rutherford."

"He's not in there."

"Where is he?"

"At home, I reckon. But you can't see him."

"Well, I don't know why I can't see him if he's at home. When are they going to begin giving back the money?"

"I don't know anything about it. I'm simply a constable here on duty."

"Well, I wanted to see him on a little matter, don't amount to much, but I thought I'd stop. Truth is, I am rather engaged in a little speculation with him, and I thought if they were going to begin paying back, why, things looked favorable enough for me to go ahead. Let me see, now, where does Mr. Rutherford live? He told me, but I've forgot."

"Right around on that street," the constable answered, waving his hand. "Big white house on the left. But unless your business is pretty important, they won't let you in. The news is out

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all over town that he won't see even his best friends till this thing is settled."

Luke looked back as the fellow continued to talk, but made no reply. Turning into another street, we walked fast toward a white house. The place looked exclusive and forbidding; the windows were darkened. The old man softened the fall of his feet upon the brick walk, and cautioned me to make no noise. Carefully he lifted the gate latch, and when we had passed through into the yard he closed the gate as carefully as if he were setting a steel trap. He stepped upon the portico and stood for a time listening; then he tried the knob. The door was locked. He looked at me with a hard smile. He tapped upon the door with his knuckles—once, twice—louder. Some one came walking down the hall.

"Who is it?" a voice demanded.

"The constable from the bank."

"Oh, is it you, Evans?"

"Yes, sir."

"Anything gone wrong?"

"No, not especially; but I want to see you a moment."

The door was opened cautiously, as if the man within would take a peep without. Luke thrust his foot though, then his knee, then shoved the door open.

"No harm done," he said to a man who stood there flushed and astonished. "I wanted to see you, Mr. Rutherford, and they told me I couldn't get in."

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"And so, sir, you decided to break in," said the banker, making a motion to put him out.

"Hold on a minute, please. I ain't quite ready to go yet. No, didn't break in exactly—didn't break your door down."

"But you violate the—the law, sir."

"Do I? Well, now, we'll talk it over, and if I'm wrong I'll apologize. Greatest hand to apologize you ever saw, when I'm wrong. Come in, doctor. This is my friend, Dr. Hudley. We want to talk to you a few moments."

"I am very busy, sir."

"I am, too, so it will be short."

The banker yielded so far as to step inside, and I entered the hall. He gave me a cool nod and led the way into a large room where a grave-looking man sat at a table with a pile of papers in front of him. He arose to retire.

"Don't go, Plummer," said the banker. "These men, or rather this man, has forced his way into my house—but what can I do for you, sir? Be brief, please."

"You don't appear to know me," said Luke.

"I don't think I can recall the pleasure of an introduction, sir."

"He's stiffer than rheumatism," said Luke, nodding at me. "No, sir, there wasn't much of an introduction," he replied to the banker. "Nobody blowed a horn and no drum was beat; but I put three thousand dollars into your bank not more than three days ago. My name's Radshaw."

"Oh, yes, I remember. Sit down, gentlemen."

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We sat down. The banker turned upon Luke a cool, inquiring smile. He had a shapely head, a cranium for the symmetry of exact figures. He was portly with long-sustained importance.

"I put that money in about three days before you shut your doors," said Luke.

"And you shall have it—every cent of it."

"Much obliged. But when?"

"Just as soon as we can straighten out our unfortunate tangle."

Plummer looked up from his figures to nod a confirmation of his master's statement.

"Didn't you know you were in a tangle when you took my money?"

"We will not discuss that, sir. I may say, however," he added, by way of gracious good measure, "that we were deceived. We were assured of assistance and felt perfectly easy."

"Then you don't know how long it will be before you can untie your knots."

"My affairs are now in the hands of the law."

"Did you tell the law that you took my money just before you locked your doors?"

"I must request you, sir, not to be impertinent. Your burden is light compared with mine."

"I don't think it is, Mr. Rutherford. Let me tell you what mine is, and then you can weigh it. That money belongs to a girl whose mother was murdered. I found her in the cold creek. I took her home with me, and mother and I warmed her with our love. The poor child has never since been

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right in her mind. But I want to tell you, sir, that at times she's as bright as a dollar."

The banker acknowledged the telling legitimacy of the comparison, and gave a weak smile of approval.

"Everybody says she is the sweetest woman in the world," Luke went on, "and she's always had the song of a bird in her heart. She don't know anything about the law or the failure of a bank. All she knows about it is that I've got some money for her. And I don't know how to make her understand that she's a pauper. Now, I know you must have money, and I'll tell you what I'll do—give me her three thousand dollars and I'll give you a mortgage on my farm. If you could see her I believe you would give me the money without the mortgage. I acknowledge to you that I started here in mighty bad humor, and now I want to tell you that I'm sorry I had to shove my way in. No man ever tried harder to go right than I have, Mr. Rutherford. I've prayed all night in the woods—begging for the spirit. And I don't want to do wrong. Give me the money and take the mortgage."

The banker's fingers rippled upon his knee. "Have you tried elsewhere to mortgage your property?" he asked.

"No, sir; I didn't think of it till just this minute."

"I am very sorry, but I can't grant your request. I can neither give nor take mortgages at present. My affairs are in the hands of the law."

"But if you could see the girl, Mr. Rutherford, I know you'd make some sort of shift to help her.

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She's grown, but we call her a child—and she couldn't understand why the money has been taken from her. She's peculiar, sir. She can understand some things that's hard, but sometimes a simple thing is so odd she can't get hold of it. Why, good gracious, sir, she might blame me. But she wouldn't say a word, I'll tell you that. And knowing this makes it all the harder for me to bear."

"I am very sorry, Mr. Ratcliff; very sorry, sir,"

"My name's Radshaw, not Ratcliff. Our family is well known all up and down old Caney Fork—and the poor child jumped into the creek the night her mother was murdered. And I took her out dripping and held her to my breast to warm her. Yes, sir, my name's Radshaw, and my grandfather put a bullet between the eyes of Black Buck, the Indian chief. My farm's all right. It was the old Hudley place, and it's worth ten thousand dollars of any man's money."

The banker got up and Plummer arose. "I am indeed very sorry," Rutherford said, walking up and down the room, "very sorry; but we'll have to wait."

"But you say you don't know how long."

"No, we can't tell The law—"

"Now, here," Luke broke in, "I've heard enough about the law." He got up. "I tell you, sir, that I've prayed all night in the woods, begging for the spirit to hold me down. And I hope it will hold me down now. Do you know what I mean?"

"I don't know that I do."

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The look that I had seen upon meeting the old man at the gate was now in his eyes.

"Then I'll tell you. I hope it may hold me off your throat. You've got money in that safe right there. Count me out three thousand dollars. No, don't go to your desk—stand where you are. And, doctor, you keep an eye on that other fellow, and I'll choke the life out of the man that makes a noise. Now, count out that money, or I'll tramp your lying tongue into the floor. Quick!"

Rutherford made a spring toward his desk, but Luke leaped upon him with the lunge of a tiger and bore him to his knees. I clapped my hand on Plummer's shoulder, with my back toward the two men on the floor, and in his frightened eyes I read the outcome of the struggle.

"I—I—will give it to you," the banker gasped.

I looked around. He was scrambling to his feet.

"I don't want to choke you to death," said Luke; "but by the Lord, I will if I don't get that money. Be spry! A banker ought to be quick at figures. Doctor, have that fellow write out a receipt and I'll sign it. Hurry up, Mr. Rutherford. Oh, if you had a pistol, you couldn't use it."

"You would murder me!" Rutherford gasped.

"Yes, and pray all night in the woods. Hurry up, or I'll shut off your wind again."

The banker unlocked the safe, shuddering, looking around from time to time as if hoping for a chance to escape. Luke stood over him. "Let me see you count it, and if you cheat I'll choke you again. Take big bills and make quicker work of it."

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Rutherford counted the money and put it on the table near the receipt, which was now ready to be signed.

"You'll find that correct, robber."

Luke threw up his head. "Don't say that again. I demand only what I've got a right to. I would have given you the mortgage."

"You will find that there is a law, sir," the banker said as Luke was signing the receipt.

"Yes, and you may give it this," Luke replied, holding out the piece of paper.

Rutherford stepped back from it.

"All right; I'll leave it here on the table. Well, we'll go now. I'll close the door, and I'll ask you not to open it for a while. Good-day."

We stepped into the hall, Luke closing the door behind him. A lady came down the stairs into the hall. She appeared surprised, and asked if Mr. Rutherford were in the library.

"Yes, ma'am," Luke answered; "but he's very busy, and will be for at least half an hour. We have been hard at work with the affairs of the bank, and they are coming out all right."

We passed out, and had I not been amused at the old fellow's quibbling I should have been provoked at the slowness of his walk toward the gate. This time he did not finger the latch lightly. He snatched it, opened the gate with a jerk, and shut it with a slam, as if in defiant mockery of his previous caution.

"I don't know," said he, as we strode down the street, "but I don't believe I'm ever going to grieve

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over this affair. I'm going straight home and confess to mother, and if she forgives me I'll be all right."

"If we get home without being arrested, we'll be in luck," said I.

"Well, now, don't worry about that, my son. He won't be anxious to have us overtaken. It will give other folks a hint to get their money in the same way. Now, let me tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to mortgage my farm and pay my part of the loss to the other depositors. Nobody must suffer on my account."

It was night when we reached home. The old man went with me to the office door, and warmly shook my hand at parting. I lay down to muse over my recklessness, my want of calculation and sanity, and it seemed to me that I had just fallen asleep when there came a loud knock at the door. I heard the old man's voice, and when I opened the door he staggered back at beholding me.

"Doctor," he said, struggling with a huskiness in his throat, "I want to get down on my knees and beg you to forgive me. I got you to go with me—I compelled you to go before I told you why I was going, and what I did all the way through was wrong—all wrong. Mother says so, and she is right. He called me a robber, and I am. Oh, was there ever a wretcheder creature! Did any man ever insult gray hairs as I do mine! And I compelled you to go with me. Don't say a word. I'm going to Gallatin and mortgage my farm. My horse is ready. I prayed with mother, and my voice hung

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low to the earth and told me I was a fool. She says I must take the money back. She is right. But I won't take Lady's—I'll take my own. I'll put her money in a safe place and mortgage my farm for three thousand and take it to Rutherford. Yes, I'm off. I'll be back by night, and to-morrow I want you to go to Scottburg with me. And if the officers of the law—but they can't come for me here without a requisition from the Governor of this State, for my—my robbery was committed in Kentucky. But if an officer comes with a requisition, tell him I am the man he wants, and not you. Tell him to wait for me."

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CHAPTER XX.

AT THE BANKER'S AGAIN.

Early the next morning we again set out for Scottburg, but this time in a devious way, for I had to call on several of my patients. I had passed a wretched time while the old man was gone, the brooding of a criminal. I had so closely adjusted myself to his rage for reparation that I had not thought upon the lawless phase of our adventure. But repentance came with the rising of another sun; and while the old man cursed himself aloud, I silently breathed "fool" in my own ear. We talked but little as we rode along. The old man muttered and I breathed "fool." Once I must have said it aloud, for he reined up his horse and looked at me. "I didn't say anything," said I, and we rode on in silence. The town arose into view, and the old fellow, worn and heavy on his horse, looked up and said:

"If I could only undo the wrong I've done you."

"Don't let that worry you."

"Are you sure that you forgive me?"

"As sure as I know that we are riding toward that town."

"God bless you, sir. You make me love my enemies—you are a friend without counting the cost. God bless you. I am an old sinner, and my

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soul must have wrinkles on it like a ram's horn. Ha, I wish I could laugh as you do. But it's a fact—like a ram's horn."

"The walls fell down when they blew the ram's horn," said I, my spirits pringling with the salt of his simile.

We tethered our horses and strode slowly toward the banker's house, a dread making our feet heavy. No one gazed at us—we passed the constable who had paced on duty in front of the bank, and he merely nodded to us. Surely no news of the robbery had been blown abroad.

At the banker's gate Luke shouted, "halloa!" as if calling out a farmer at midnight. A curtain was drawn aside, giving us a glimpse of a face, and soon afterward the hall door was opened.

"What do you want?" Rutherford demanded, thrusting forth his head.

"I have come back, sir, to beg your pardon, and to return the money I robbed you of."

"You have?"

"Yes, sir, and I am ready to drop right down and beg you to forgive me. I told you in the first place that I was a mighty hand to apologize if I found out I was in the wrong. I was wrong and I apologize with my head hung this way."

He bent his neck to show his humiliation. I thought of a wrinkled ram's horn and had to turn away to hide my face.

"Come in," said the banker.

He opened the door wide, and gracefully bowed both of us into the library.

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"Here's your money," said Luke, dropping a bundle of bank notes on the table in front of the astonished Mr. Plummer. "And now you will please give me my receipt."

Plummer pulled open a drawer and handed him the slip of paper. The banker looked on with the pale light of wonderment in his weary eyes.

"Sit down, gentlemen," he said. "Doctor, this chair; Mr. Radshaw, this easy one. I must say that I am more than astonished. Yes, more than astonished at your returning the money than I was that you choked it out of me. You have begged my pardon. I grant it. In fact, I couldn't blame you if I tried. Keep your seat, sir. I told my wife and she cried. She had heard of the girl whose mother was murdered. We know your neighborhood—on our wedding tour we stopped and drank out of Caney Fork. When I told her what had happened she said: 'I have three thousand dollars of my own. Charge me with the amount the old man took.' As I told you, Mr. Radshaw, I was really deceived about the condition of the bank. I thought we were perfectly safe when your money was accepted. And now I find that we are much better off than was supposed at the time we closed the doors. The bank will resume business at once. Every cent shall be paid on demand next Monday morning. Take back your money, Mr. Radshaw."

"No, no!" the old man cried, breaking down. "I mortgaged my farm for it—I wanted to give my own money—I won't touch it."

"But it is yours. You are giving me too kindly

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an eye, Mr. Radshaw. I would have had you arrested, but my wife interposed. And I'm glad I didn't, sir. You have shown me that you are more than honest—you are honorable. Here comes my wife. Emma, this is Dr. Hudley, and this is Mr. Radshaw, the old gentleman who deposited the girl's money. And see, he has brought it back."

"Not the same, sir; not the same," Luke made haste to reply, bowing to the lady. "No, not the same, ma'am. I mortgaged my farm for this."

She smiled upon him, and touching her hand he dropped on one knee. "Oh, ma'am, I beg you to forgive me. I was nearly crazy. I thought of our little girl a pauper and it robbed me of all heart except for her. But mother brought my heart back and I kneel and ask your pardon as I've knelt in the woods many a time."

She took his hands and helped him to his feet. "There, don't let it worry you," she said, her eyes softly bright as she looked upon his humble submission. "We are all to blame and we all forgive one another. Sit down, please. Doctor, I am pleased to meet you. I remember hearing my sister tell of meeting your mother at a ball one night given by the Governor of the State; and I have heard others speak of her beauty and sweetness of disposition."

"Madame," said I, bowing, "you deck a sweet memory with a rose."

"Oh," she replied, smiling, "you make me grateful to my own recollection. There, now, let us all be cheerful, brighter for having come through the fire. Take your money, Mr. Radshaw."

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"It is your husband's bank, ma'am. I've got faith in him and when I want it I'll draw it out. If I haven't deposited it in the regular way, why you have it fixed to suit yourself. May the Lord bless all of you. Doctor, let's ride."

"Not till you have eaten with us," said Mrs. Rutherford.

"Yes, we'll go, ma'am. I must get back home and tell mother that the Lord is in the town as well as in the woods. Ma'am, I can't hope that on my death-bed I'll hear anything sweeter than your voice. Doctor, let's ride."

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CHAPTER XXI.

CONCEITS THAT CAME AT NIGHT.

After lowly repentance there always came to Luke an uplifting happiness. At morning he hummed a tune as he stood with his arms resting on the fence, looking at the pigs; and at night he came in with a jest on his lips and a humor, like a mellow apple, in his heart. Sometimes before daylight he would come down to the office and rap on the door, to tell of the conceits that had visited his mind during the night. A story constructed during a wakeful hour he would call a personal recollection.

"I just happened to think last night of old Pete Clendennin," he began one morning when I opened the door for him. "I knew him well," he went on as he sat down, a gleam of mischief in his eye, and in his throat a chuckling like the rattling of dice in a leather box. "Yes, sir, and up to the time he was forty I reckon he was as game a man as you ever saw. You couldn't spring any new thing on him to scare him. Fought a bear once—brushed the dogs aside and waded right into the center of the trouble; and he killed the bear—cut him all to pieces. Strange disposition he had, too. Had to fight just so often, anyhow. If he didn't there'd come a sort of stagnation that would interfere with his health and the doctors would have to bleed him. Many a

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time at breakfast he'd shove himself back from the table and say to his wife, 'Can't eat a thing—got to go out and give my blood a fresh start.' He'd probably come back with his head punched, a purple nose and a black eye, but his appetite would be as keen as a briar. As I tell you it was this way till he had about reached the age of forty. Then he took some calomel, was salivated and lost about all his teeth. He got well—as strong as a buck, but he wouldn't fight. A man rode up to his house and called him a liar while he sat at the table eating the first mess of green pease of the season, and he didn't even protest against it. He just clapped his hand to his mouth and shook his head. It was soon noised about that he'd lost his nerve, and, sir, after this, many a man who had nothing against him would go over and take a fall out of him when there wasn't anything else to do on the place. And they kept him pretty busy of a Saturday after dinner—they'd come and whip him before they shaved for Sunday. They got to believing that unless they thrashed Clendennin once every so often they'd have bad luck. It went on this way, year after year, till a good many of our leading citizens forgot that he ever would fight. Well, sir, a traveling dentist came along putting in sets of teeth on time. Clendennin concluded he'd try a set, as he could have 'em on time and might die and get off paying for 'em altogether. So the dentist fixed them up and they fitted like a charm. And the next minute old Clendennin clapped his hand to his mouth, felt of the muscles of his arm and yelled to a nigger to

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fetch his horse. He galloped off, and for three days he whipped every man he met, old and young, strangers, lawyers and judges—it made no difference. Yes, sir, and it all goes to show how a little thing may influence a man. I have thought of it, and I don't know but there's a good deal in this question of teeth. Take it in a matter of success, for instance. As long as a man's got teeth he can recover himself if he fails—lose one fortune and make another. But let him lose his teeth and he sets down."

He leaned back and shook. "What fool things a man will think of in bed," he went on, wiping his eyes with a red handkerchief. "And he can think of wise things too, but he dozes and the wise things shrivel to nothing when he wakes up. Ah, but how plump the fool things are. They fatten as wisdom dwindles. And, sir, it's pretty much that way all through life. When we look back how clear the little things are and what a fog surrounds the big ones. Yes, sir, we can look way back yonder and see the brook better than we can the river. Well, we'll go up to breakfast now as soon as you're ready. The air is as soft this morning as a kitten's paw; and it may have claws under it, too. You can't place any faith in March even in this climate. Doctor, I believe the teacher will marry Glich."

"Yes, I believe so," said I, "and to tell you the truth I could wish she wouldn't."

"Why, ain't she honest?"

"As honest as daylight for all I know, but something more than honesty is required to make a home

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of a house. She's peculiar; I won't deny that she has fine qualities. But when the novelty wears off she and Glich will snarl and snap and bite, perhaps. But he's got his thoughtless head and his inflamed heart set on marrying her, and it's no use to say anything."

"You are right, sir, you're right. He's almost like a mad dog and you can't do a thing with him. He kept on hinting about his marrying her, and finally he came out flat, but told me not to say anything to her, as if I'd be such an unfeeling fool. His mother knows that the teacher ain't suited to him, but she'll never say a word. Ain't it strange that a woman is so bold with her husband and so backward with her son—about expressing her mind? Well, we'll have to make the best of it. But there is still a worse side to it—that little girl in the cabin down the road. I saw her yesterday and her cheeks were pale. She called to me as I passed her house. She came out to the fence and stood with her arms resting on the broken gate. I had been over to the woods to look for the red heifer, but hadn't found her. She stopped me to say that she had found her down in the willow thicket and had driven her home. Strange creature. I've never been able to hide a trouble from her. Her sympathies are always telling tales to her. She knew mother was sitting up at night to card batts for the new quilts, and when the others had gone to bed she came over and worked with mother till long after twelve o'clock. And, sir, never a word of complaint came from her about Glich. She was glib about everything else

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but the teacher and Glich. But come. Breakfast must be ready."

There seemed to be a sort of resignation in Miss Silvester's step. Once it had been springy with half spiteful humors, but now it was slower and more thoughtful. I looked after her as she set out for school, and remembering that I had a patient in her neighborhood, overtook her.

"I'm going your way," said I.

"Is it possible? I've seen so little of you lately that I had begun to doubt that our ways would ever again lie in the same direction. What an unseasonable day it is—full of warm sighs."

"Malarious breaths," said I.

"The doctor of it," she replied, and after a moment she added: "Then a malarious wind is not an ill wind—to you. But it is to me. I'll sit and yawn all day with a sleepy hum in my ears."

"Bees humming about the comb of sweet knowledge," said I.

"Oh, you are getting back to your temper of flattery. I thought you'd forgotten me. But your brief excursion into outlawry hasn't dried up your syrup. How does it feel to commit a robbery and then return to beg for mercy?"

"There are two feelings—one of the fierce bull-dog, and the other of the cringing cur."

"How graceful is confession. You felt like a bull-dog and then like a cur. Life is not uneventful when we can crowd experiences that way. You don't need to go back to the West to find entertainment. I knew something had happened for I

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heard the old woman praying in the night. But I thought it was an ordinary lapse on Luke's part. I didn't know but Satan had performed one of his old tricks—had no idea that he had inspired robbery. I was almost shocked when I learned that you were mixed up in it. But please don't defend yourself. You didn't mean any harm, of course. But tell me what my lord and master Glich said to you."

"He said nothing to me. He grunted."

"No? He said nothing to you? Well, he saved his tirades and his blasphemies for me. He swore he would have hanged himself rather than to beg for mercy. But then he's not afraid of his father's bugaboo, the devil. Are you?"

"Do I show any signs of belief in him?"

"I don't know. But some sort of change has come over you. You have committed yourself to some sort of faith. You have some sort of religion that you hadn't when you came here. It may not have put very much of a restraint on you; it didn't keep you from feeling like a fierce bull-dog. But perhaps it introduced the cringing cur. But there now, I don't want to rouse you. I'm simply trying to make you tell me what it is. I can see it in your eyes—hear it in your voice, at times. It must be love. Is it? Tell me."

"If it were love and I should tell you, you couldn't understand. You have confessed that you don't know what love is."

I helped her over a fence. She thanked me and we walked on in silence. Her step was dragging. She looked tired. A pity for her arose in my heart.

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Or was it a pity for myself, for my heartlessness toward her? It must have been, for at the moment when pity rose there rose also an admiration for her. Yes, the pity must have been for myself.

"And so I don't know what love is. Is that tender knowledge so warmly given to everyone else and so coldly denied me? Doctor, you've nibbled at love and now you come with your cheeks puffed out as if your mouth were full. Didn't I tell you I loved Glich?"

"No. You said you went to bed with your blood tingling and that you almost loved him."

"Oh. So that's what I said. But don't you know that when we almost love we are fighting against a love that must soon conquer us?"

"Then you do love him. I am glad of it—if you are going to marry him. I should like to see you the wife of the man you love. Your heart may be stormy, but in there is also a beautiful calm."

"Please don't talk to me that way unless you mean it."

"I do mean it."

"Then I will hold no friendship in reserve from you."

She halted and facing about with a smile, put both her hands in mine. "Now," she said as we resumed our walk, "friendship is engaged to friendship."

"Yes. But I have always been your friend—that is, I've never been your enemy. I didn't look with favor upon your engagement to Glich, and now I believe it was on your account more than on his.

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It would grieve me to see you wretched. And I must confess, too, that the Boyce girl has wrapped herself up in my sympathy. I think the world of Old Luke. I love him for his ill-directed strengths and his sorrowful weaknesses. And I fully believe that he could at any time lead me into serious trouble. I know his heart so well that with him I am all impulse with no judgment. I wouldn't have gone with anyone else to that banker's house. I would have thought over the matter and condemned it. But I went with him and took no time to think. I didn't think to think."

"But why did you speak of him! We were talking of my engagement to Glich. Does he condemn it? Remember our plighted friendship."

There was but one way out of this bear trap into which I had stumbled. I had to gnaw off a moral foot. I lied as little as I could, it is true; I resorted to the consoling deception of the falsehood omitted; I could not tell her of Luke's lament over Mattie Boyce. I have seen more than one time when to tell the truth would not have been to the shame of the devil, for truth was what he wanted. I remember to have heard a horse-racing Kentuckian say, "I admire the devil, sir. I have caught him in many a truth." Yes, I lied even further than to omit; I told her that so far as I knew old Luke was warmed by the thought that she was to be his son's wife. I knew that the engagement had not been recognized in the house. It was a secret known to all, but from one to another around the circle no confidences were passed.

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"Why doesn't Luke speak to me about it? Why does his wife keep her mouth shut? Is our engagement a cause for silence, like a family mishap? I don't like it. They ought to say something. Oh, Glich would break the ice if I'd let him. He'd lead me in with a bluster, swear and overturn the table and throw the family Bible on the floor. But I won't have it. I want them to come to me and not as if they were conferring a favor, either."

"You want them to acknowledge that Glich is looking up."

"Yes. Why shouldn't they? Have I burned out my eyes with study for nothing? Of course he's looking up. I have done something with myself. I pawned my soul, it is true, but that proves the greatness of my desire to do something."

"You are right," said I. "Glich is a stormy waste of opportunities. His father would have put him to a profession, but I am told that he roared whenever the old man mentioned law or medicine. He is a big, violent heart."

"He is always the fierce bull-dog and never the cringing cur," she said, laughing. "But you haven't told me of your new-found religion. What is it?"

"If you know, or if you can guess, don't force me to tell, for it is a sorrow as well as a religion."

"Yes, I know," she said, glancing up at me with a softened eye. "I know, and brooding over it I have—I could say that I have wet my pillow with tears, but that wouldn't be exactly true. However it gives you an idea of how I have felt. Is there no hope at all?"

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"There is a hope in fondness, but perhaps not in science."

"Then what is to be the outcome?"

"A man and a woman, old in years and children in love."

"But could there be a brighter hope than that? How could there be a purer happiness than this restored Eden? Have you seen her lately?"

"She came to the house yesterday at noon."

"Has she a sense of the bashfulness of love?"

"No. She gives me the kiss of a child."

"What a romance, and how native to these hills and deep woods. The very air is full of poetry, so sweetly oppressive that no one has the energy to interpret the moods of nature. Here we live poetry and to write it would be too common a chronicle. Oh, this lazy day, the first of spring, how it inspires us to yawn and let our lazy words leak out. I wish I had nothing to do to-day but to sit about and let my mind nod. I wish I were that hackberry tree. Look, its buds are swelling. There's the hateful bell. The children see me coming."

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CHAPTER XXII.

WIPED OUT THE MOON.

In the evening I strode through the warm woods to the creek, and knelt upon the rock to drink. And I stood there musing upon the foundation of my love, for it was there that we had drunk together, our heads touching. Along the road I went at a dreamy pace. From the sheltering timber, birds flew down to roost in the sassafras bushes, as if to be nearer the newly warmed earth. On distant hill-sides where the awakened farmer had cleared fresh land for tobacco fields, brush fires glowed, filling the air with the first incense burnt to the new season. In marshy places frogs had set up their lonesome choruses, and deep in the woods the mournful whip-poor-will sang a sweetly-sad welcome to the softened night. Old Miss Polly was humming a dolorous air when I tapped at her portal. I heard her overturn a chair as she jumped to her feet. And then she came trotting across the floor, wondering aloud who it could be, but upon opening the door she declared that she knew all the time who it was.

"Come right in. Why, law me, I'd know your knock in a thousand. I may mutter, but I always know. You knock exactly like your father. Now, what do you want to snort about? Sit down, for

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gracious sake. Do shove that cat out of the way. She'll cover you with her hairs a rubbin' agin you that way. Good-for-nothin' thing, wants to pretend she knows you, but a cat knows one person about as well as another when it comes to that—pretendin' love all the time and wouldn't give a mew if her best friend was dead. Talk to me about a cat. But she's like the newralgia—she's company. I've let the fire go out, the night's so warm. Did anybody ever see such weather? Lady's out in the woods somewhere. She's gone to rake away the leaves where the first violets grow. What are they all doin' over at Luke's? Tell his wife I'm a thousand times obliged to her for that nice butter she sent me. She's always doin' somethin'. She keeps a body under obligations to her from one year's end to another, and I don't like it, I'll tell you that. I hear that Luke sent the finest turkey gobbler on the place to that banker's wife. I'll be bound for him always doin' somethin' like that. And didn't that affair beat anything you ever seen in your life? And you were in it up to your eyes—a Hudley all over. I reckon Luke's got enough peace to last him till the crops begin to grow, and then the mules will jump into the field and fetch him. And Glich. I heard him round here the other night a blowin' of his horn at the hounds. Gracious me, a gallopin' through the briars and bushes after a fox. I'd ketch myself at it. Music indeed! Why not shut up the hounds and set down in a rockin' chair and listen to 'em howl to get out? Come talkin' to me about music. And I reckon the teacher is

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goin' to marry him after all. Won't she take her ducks to a market, sure enough? Here comes Lady now."

Lady entered the room and turned to shut the door but catching sight of me, left it open and ran to me to be kissed.

"Oh, Mitford, I was wishing you would come and here you are. Let me get my stool."

She drew up a low stool, and sitting down, leaned with her arms on my knees, looking up at me.

"She talks about you all the time," said Miss Polly. "She follows me up to talk about you, and to-day I had to say, 'Goodness alive, let me alone about him. Don't tell me about him. I knew him before you were born.'"

"But nobody knows him as well as I do. Do they Mitford?"

"You know my heart as no one else could know it," said I, stroking her hair.

"Oh, listen to that, Miss Polly Lolly."

"Go on with your kitten affairs and don't bother me with what you know and don't know. Now, what did I do with that knittin'? Well, did anybody ever see a half-finished stockin' walk off that way before? I always thought they had to have a foot in 'em to walk off, but it 'pears they don't. I had it a minute ago. Well, if that good-for-nothin' cat hain't taken it over there in the corner. And what's to become of serious folks when old cats take to prankin' like that? But go on you two and don't let me disturb you. Law me, doctor, your

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little girl has been as bright as a judge lately. The teacher gave her a book full of swords and 'what hos' and 'out upon yous,' and she has been readin' to me. Foolishness, rank foolishness, I say, but it did tell of one lubberly creature that had some sense, but I'd hate mightily to cook for him."

Lady jumped up and brought a pamphlet print of Henry IV. She opened it upon my knee and turned the leaves. "I have read all along here," she said. "Sometimes it's clear like a spring and then it gets muddy like a pond, and then I put it away till it gets clear again. Miss Silvester sat in the woods at playtime and read all these pages to me. Sometimes she's so good, and then she goes off by herself and won't let anybody come near her. Some of the men in here had torches. How did they get them, Mitford? Could they take them when some one handed them out of the darkness? Let me see. Oh, it must have been lanterns they had. I wonder why I always think of a torch when I read of a light?"

"But you musn't," said Miss Polly. "Come, now, put up your book. You have worried with it enough to-day."

With a smile of cheerful obedience she put the book on the mantel-piece and then sat down upon a chair, her face serious. She looked at me and in her eyes I fancied that I saw a dark and bright contention as if her divided mind were struggling with itself. But presently she smiled again.

"The sheep are rubbing against the rough bark of the trees," she said. "They go into the thicket

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to be picked. They are too warm. They know they ought to be sheared, but when we go to shear them they are scared. There is no way you can shear a sheep without frightening it. Whenever you throw a sheep down he thinks he's going to be killed."

"Now just listen at her goin's on," said Miss Polly. "Of course it scares a sheep if you grab him, but he don't know what death is. He'd eat grass under the tree where his mother's hung up by the heels. I wonder if I dropped a stitch then, turnin' off after your foolishness? I did. And a woman must be gettin' putty old when she can't tell whether she's dropped a stitch or not."

"It's wrong to kill sheep," the girl mused aloud. "Children are loved sometimes when they wouldn't be if the Savior hadn't said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me.' And he said 'Feed my sheep,' but we kill them."

"Gracious me, don't talk that way or I'll never eat another piece of mutton as long as I live," Miss Polly declared. "But," she added, "the Savior didn't say not to kill the sheep. He said feed 'em, for they have to be fattened."

"I know, Mammy, but it looks cruel to feed them and then kill them. Doesn't it, Mitford?"

"Yes, but the Savior didn't mean real sheep. He meant his flock—those who loved him."

"Oh, but he said sheep when he meant those who loved him. He must have picked out sheep because they are so innocent and loving."

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"Never eat another bite of mutton as long as I live. Never," Miss Polly declared.

"I wish you wouldn't eat anything that has ever lived," said Lady.

The old woman roused herself from the compassion into which she had settled. "Not even a goose? Well, I'll eat geese, I'll tell you that. They've been the worry of my life, a settin' on brick-bats and door-knobs. I'll eat 'em and I'll sleep on their feathers, the fetch-taked things. But stop talkin' about eatin' so soon after supper. Now I wonder if I shut that hen house door. I went out to shut it, but somebody came along and I don't know whether I did or not. Did I, Lady?"

"Yes, ma'm, I saw you."

"Well, thank goodness that's off my mind. I do have more to contend with than anybody I ever saw. And when I look at Mrs. Radshaw and see how easy she takes the goin' on of things about the house, I say to myself, 'Mercy on me, woman, why don't you worry some, to let folks know you are alive?"

"She's easy going," said I, "but she's had enough worry in her time—over Glich and Luke."

"Oh, of course, but anybody could have worried over them. She don't deserve any credit for that, goodness knows. It's seein' folks fret over little things that gives me encouragement. So Glich has quit drinkin', sure enough. But I don't see that it has made much difference in him. A man can be mighty triflin' in my sight and never drink no whisky, nuther. Now there's old Sapperson—

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never touched liquor as far as I know, but a worthlesser human never lived. Jest set round the house and let his wife and daughters support him. I was over there one day and I said to him, I did, 'Why in the name of common sense don't you get drunk to prove that you are fitten for something?' And one of his daughters ups and says, 'Pap's tired.' 'Tired your granny's foot,' says I. 'What has ever happened to make him tired, a settin' there a chawin' of tobacco from mornin' till night? If he was anything to me I'd make him do something. I'd put fleas in his underclothes and make him scratch himself. I'd make him show that much energy or be bit.' And do you know the triflin' old scoundrel never liked me after that? He didn't—he went around and talked about my cookin'. He said I couldn't even boil water; and I sent him word that I'd always have enough boilin' water to scald his hide off if he'd come under my kitchen window. Boil water, indeed! Lady, while the doctor's settin' here doin' nothin' get him to hold a hank of yarn while you wind a ball for me."

I held the hank while Lady wound the ball—wound up my life with her own. Miss Polly continued to talk, but I gave her a dozing ear, awaking only at starts to the sound of her voice. I was wrapped in a love-hungry study of the face before me, of the hands going round; and I wondered if my mind were not laced in dark threads with her own. I had ceased to reason with myself. Once I had reasoned, when hoping that I was merely infatuated with her handsome face, but now I knew that

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were she plain her eyes would fire a love within me. Ah, sweet and perfumed poison, beyond the skill of the chemist's analyzing eye; mystic contagion, how defiant of all self-summoned power to eradicate. Older than the first gray hair on the head of new-made man and yet with a youth younger than the first breath of a child; the scoff of the cold in heart; the torturer of the strong; the despair of the wise; the hope of the fool; the glory of the world.

The yarn ran off, and Lady tossed the ball into Miss Polly's lap. I arose to take my leave. "I'll go out to the gate with you," said the girl.

"And so will I," Miss Polly declared, dropping her knitting. "I can't bear to set in the house when folks are goin' away. I always say to myself, 'What if I should never see 'em again?' And it's a mighty consolin' thing when a friend dies to think you've done the best you could and wan't shut off in the house when he was a tellin' of the others good-by."

The moon, mellowed by warm vapors, was full above the tree-tops, touching the earth with a yellowish tint. And a white yearling in the road flashed a human weakness from Holy Writ, idolatrous old Israel's golden calf.

As I was about to pass through the gate Lady clutched my arm.

"It's gone," she said. "A black hand wiped it out. Don't you see? Wiped out the moon. Oh, the torch—coming—the torch—oh, Mitford!"

She shrieked and fell back into my arms, and I carried her into the house. Following the old

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woman, I put her on a bed. Her eyes were closed, the lids trembling, her face white. And all through the long hours of that dark time I sat beside her, and at morning with the coming of the sun she opened her eyes.

"Oh," she sobbed, "they wouldn't let me take it to make the world light. They threw it down and everything was black."

She caught my hand and tightly held it.

"Don't go away," she repeated over and over again, "don't go away." She sank into a natural sleep. A bird with a straw in its beak peeped in at the window.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

A ROPE UNDER THE EAVES.

Deceitful March forgot her treachery and proved true mother to the tender spring. One morning the willow boughs were tipped with faint yellow, the next morning pink, the next day green. What a joy it was to live, to fill the lungs with scented air, to lie on the ground and with tender brushing of the hand feel the new down on the cheek of the old earth. At such a time there's something gentle in the fiercest ruffian. The most stubborn atheist has a touch of faith. The writer forgets the cool judgment of critics and lets his pen run warm riot. The preacher breaks compact with the narrow creed and proclaims the universal love of God. The lawyer tosses a sprig of green sentiment to the vacant-eyed jury. The poet puts behind him all that has been said of spring and views it as a new discovery. And thus the rural world is kept from growing stale.

On Saturday afternoon I loitered in the sitting-room of the farmhouse, the windows up, the great fireplace filled with wild plum boughs in bloom. Miss Silvester and old Bethpage came in, dropping at the door the lag end of an earnest talk. I had seen the old fellow a number of times since

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his visit on the night of the snow, but only once had he hinted at the fear that then distressed him. But now that he saw me in the young woman's presence, his uneasiness seemed to return, and the pleasant greeting she gave me wrought a frown upon his countenance. "Mr. Bethpage," said Miss Silvester, "sit over near the window. You look warm. Shall I get you a fan?"

"No, I'm much obliged to you. If I look warm, and I reckon I do, it's with a heat that don't come with the weather and no fan can cure it."

She smiled at me. "We all understand the fires of youth, but I don't know that I comprehend the fires of age."

He tried to laugh but failed. "I didn't mean that I was on fire, or anything of the sort. The truth is I don't know exactly what I did mean; that I might look red but wasn't hot, I reckon. But don't you worry about my age. I admit that I ain't scorching with youth, and I'm not freezing with age, either. There's a good many men around here older than I am. I'm not the oldest man in the county by a long shot. I feel as young as ever I did—mighty near. And I act as young as the doctor there, right now."

"Younger," I was quick to reply. "You don't forget to act while I may fall to thinking and appear old."

"Don't forget to act! Don't know that I like that any too well, Doc."

"You said you acted—younger."

"Yes, but you give my meaning a twist to suit

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yourself. I don't think he likes me any too well, Miss Silvester."

"Oh, I'm sure he likes you, Mr. Bethpage. He often speaks of you."

"Well, I don't reckon there's any doubt of his speaking about me. But how is it, Doc?"

"I wish you wouldn't call me Doc. Out West when they don't know a gambler's name they call him Doc. I will leave Miss Silvester to give my opinion of you."

"It strikes me you two have set out to have fun with me," said the old man. "Do I look so alfired funny? Do I set myself up for a mark? Well, just go ahead and you'll find me stepping right along with you. By the way, I saw your horse hitched at Balsch's. Is the old fellow sick?"

"He's up again—had bilious colic and thought he was going to die. I found him alone, with no one to wait on him, except Mattie Boyce, who came as often as she could leave her work. His wife and daughter packed up and left him some time ago."

"So I heard," he replied, stroking his beard and brushing a fallen bristle from his coat. "Pity, too, I'll tell you, to run off and leave him now he's getting old. He worked for them and fed them, and now that he's old and in the way they throw him off. It's the way with life, though; an obligation don't count for much these days."

"He deserves no more pity than a sheep-killing dog," said Miss Silvester. "He got to be such a beast that his wife and daughter couldn't live with

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him. He turned the girl out the night of the big snow and in her bare feet she walked to a neighbor's house. He threatened to shoot the neighbor for taking her in. He called it an interference with his family affairs. And then he pretended that he was going to hang himself. I heard of it and I took down the swing at the school and sent him the rope with my compliments."

Bethpage laughed with a dry cackle, but evidently fearing that the puniness of his mirth was a reflection on his age, he seized his dyed beard and looked wise.

"I met him in the path soon afterward," the teacher went on, "and he didn't look as if he intended to step aside to let me pass, so I bowed my neck and walked at him, but he lurched out of the way. If he had touched me I would have stabbed him with a hat pin."

"Mettle, sir, mettle," said Bethpage with a wag of his head. "Men have to stand aside these days when they see a woman coming."

"Now Mr. Bethpage, is it possible that you can show a disposition to take sides with that brute?"

"Oh, no, I'm not taking sides with him; but I do think the neighbors and the women folks especially have united against him without hearing his side of the story. But that's the way with the world. When a man begins to get a little old folks put it down that he's had his day, and therefore don't deserve anything more, not even a fair hearing."

The teacher turned to me as if she could not trust

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her temper to reply to him. "Is Lady well again?" she asked.

"Yes, she was in bed only two days."

"Then I suppose she will be back to school by Monday. She is always so bright, or I might say coherent, after one of her spells. I miss her greatly."

Luke and his wife came in. Bethpage hopped up with the forced agility of an old horse. Luke, laughing, said that the myriad of blossoms promised a big persimmon crop. Bethpage sadly shook his head in memory of the narrowness of his escape from a doctor's bill.

"I don't want any more persimmon pudding," he said.

"Yes," replied Luke, "you may feel that way now, but your old ears will catch the spat of the first persimmon that strikes the ground this fall. You'll—"

"Hold on, Luke. Old ears. Why old ears? Are my ears so much older than yours? Why should you speak of mine being old and not yours?"

"Because I can see yours and not mine."

"Mrs. Radshaw," said Bethpage, "you'll have to tone this old fellow down a bit."

"Law me, Mr. Bethpage, there's no toning of him down. He has to run his course. But he ain't feeling well to-day—he didn't sleep much last night."

"But that's no reason why my ears should be older than his."

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"No," she admitted, "none in the world. What's your sister doing?"

"Seeing to the garden. She's a great hand for a garden. And I tell you a sister's a great comfort."

"He talks like a boy," Miss Silvester whispered.

"Hush, he might hear you."

"Not with those old ears. It takes the clink of money to make them young."

"I dropped in to-day to see Miss Polly," said Bethpage. "She's the same little old cricket."

"Old cricket?" Luke spoke up.

"Well, she's not young, Luke."

"No, and neither was her husband, but he called you mister when he was a boy."

"There you go, and of course the last one of you have to laugh at a thing like that. He was of my age, if not older, and he called me mister because I had a negro slave riding behind me. Ah, those were the days when a man's real worth brought him respect. Why, here comes Glich. I haven't seen him in a long time. How are you, sir?"

Glich shook hands with him and turning about to find a chair said to me: "The old fool has dyed his beard. It looks like the tip end of a black calf's tail."

This set the teacher to laughing, and at her Bethpage shot a look of jealous inquiry. "What was it he said, miss?" he asked. "Tell us, so we can all laugh."

"Glich's wit repeated loses half its edge," she said.

Glich slapped his leg. "There you have it. Oh, she'd put a keen edge on a meat ax. And I don't

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make any bones of saying she catches me every time she opens her mouth."

"And she's wiser in her silence than we are in our brightest talk," said I.

"What would we do without our gallant doctor?" she cried. "No wonder all the girls have set their caps for him. No wonder I heard a baby called Mitford. An older Mitford had won the mother with a compliment."

"Bethpage," said Luke, "we're shut out from all such talk as that. We are put aside," he added with a wink. "We have reached an age when we enjoy things most that remind us of something we have felt or seen. We live back yonder."

"Luke, don't nag him," his wife spoke up. "He don't mean it, Mr. Bethpage. He ain't well and he's just trying to fret you."

"Oh, I know him, ma'm, and he don't fret me as much as you might think. But the back yonder does mean a great deal to him. Then it was a fight or a foot-race all the time. But he needn't worry about me. I didn't live back yonder any more than I do to-day. You needn't laugh, Luke."

"I'm not laughing, I'm sneezing. I don't know where I took such a cold. I've been sneezing off and on all day."

"I told you not to sit in a draft with your coat off and you so warm," his wife replied.

"Yes, I know," said he, "but it gets mighty tiresome when a man is compelled to do everything except something he feels like doing." He

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sneezed again. "I don't know of anything more unreasonable than a warm-weather cold. It's like a fellow with a high voice singing out of tune in church."

"Well, you go and lie down and let me put something warm to your feet," said his wife.

"I'll lie down but I don't want anything put to my feet," he replied; and getting up with a yawn he added: "I recollect one time I stopped at a house on a cold day to get warm, and just before I started on again the woman of the house called her son and told him to wrap up a hot brick and put it in the buggy. I got in and drove off and, sir, my feet began to get cold, and I unwound the piece of blanket and I wish I may die dead if the rascal hadn't wrapped up a lump of ice. Well, come on, mother. Now never you mind, doctor. I see you eying me. Stay right where you are. Nothing would tickle you more than to get me down in bed and feed me on medicine."

Glich leaned toward Miss Silvester, and with earnest talk was holding her attention. From a word caught now and then I judged that she still kept him gambling for her love. To give him free room I went over and sat down near Bethpage. For a time he listened, the dim light of a dry grin on his countenance, and then he strove to break in, but his splash drew away no mead of their interest. I said something and he nodded without looking at me, straining his hairy ears to catch a word from the young man's mumble. But after a while he turned to me and in a low tone said:

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"It seems to me that he has plenty of opportunity to talk to her during the week. But you'd think he hadn't seen her for a year. Hanged if I don't believe he's telling her he loves her."

"I shouldn't be surprised," I replied, a cool shiver of mischief running over me.

"Hah!" he coughed at me. "You wouldn't? Has there been anything of the sort in the—the air, I might say?"

"In the wind or the storm you might better put it."

"I don't know what you mean. Oh, yes, that he's a blusterer. But he mustn't bluster with me. I'll tell you that."

"Don't tell me—tell him."

"I will. I won't have my rights flouted by a blusterer. How long has this thing been going on?"

"Ever since I came and I don't know how long before."

"Oh, but you are a comforter. Strange nobody ever said anything to me about it."

"No stranger than that someone should have said you had me to fear."

"Oh, well, that was mostly a guess of mine, based on the fact that she talked a good deal about you. But she's never said a word about him."

"Which ought to have marked him as dangerous," said I.

"Hah! That's so. But why should it tickle you? What have you got against me? I've never done you any harm."

I could have told him that he misrepresented the

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spirit of the South, that his shriveled nature was a slur cast at the big hearts of Tennessee, but with a show of good humor I remarked: "You threatened to call me out."

"So, a little thing like that sticks in your crop, does it? I didn't think it of you. I was joking anyway. Look at her. She never grinned in my face that way. Here, I say there, what are you two talking about? I say, Glich."

"Well, what's up?"

"What are you talking about?"

"The devil."

Miss Silvester's brows were drawn in reproof. "You mustn't talk like that. It isn't respectful."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Bethpage," said Glich.

She smiled upon him. "Now you are more like yourself—or rather more like what you should be."

"Yes," said Bethpage, "but why did you say the devil, Glich?"

"Didn't I beg your pardon?"

"Yes, but that ain't telling me."

"You'd better not press him," I whispered, surprised to feel that I had some little compassion for him.

"Why did I say the devil?" said Glich. "Because I oughtn't. I nearly always say the thing I oughtn't. Doctor," he added, leaning low and peeping through the window, "there's a boy at your office door."

Bethpage, telling them that he would soon return, walked part way down the lawn with me. He wanted my aid. He said it was strange that no one seemed

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to have any respect for him. He didn't know why. He had never harmed anyone, and he was liberal with his money. He gave to the church—had given three dollars toward buying a stove, and it was at his instance that his sister had knitted a pair of socks for the preacher. The freeing of the slaves had changed everything. There was a time when the common man doffed his hat to the gentleman, but now he was laughed at and called out of date. Why shouldn't a man want to marry a woman younger than himself? Love was always young. And that Glich was a fool for presuming to court a woman so far his superior in education. And who had educated her? Why, every grace her mind could show was due to him. Every prettiness was a ribbon he had tied there. He turned back and I was glad to escape his whining.

I was summoned down the road. Mattie Boyce waved her hand at me as I passed her house. Farther along I saw old Balsch sitting in front of his door. On a peg under the eaves I saw a rope. Halting, I asked after his health. "Gettin' about agin all right," he answered. "But I don't know as it makes much difference. All by myself."

"Then your wife and daughter haven't returned."

"No, and they needn't. They hulled out, and now I say it's a good riddance. If it hadn't been for that little gal down the road yonder I would have perished for water."

"Didn't the school teacher call to see you?" I asked with my eye on the rope.

He grunted. "No, but she didn't forget me. She

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sent me that rope up there with her compliments. She heard that I'd threatened to hang myself. It was a lie—I didn't. And I'm goin' to keep that rope to show the people what sort of a woman is teachin' the children of this neighborhood. Thar it is with a card tied on it—and her name and compliments writ on the card. Yes, and that's the sort of a woman that teaches school these days. And I'm goin' to keep it. Nobody can git it away from me—goin' to let it hang thar so folks can see it as they pass along the road."

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CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STOUT MAN'S ENEMY.

Luke did not come to breakfast the next morning. His wife said that he had tossed throughout the night, muttering worries in his dozing, rubbing his dry hands together. I hastened to his bedside, and found him struggling with pneumonia, the stout man's deadly enemy. Except when I had to gallop away to attend upon other patients I sat beside him, wishing I had no outside cares to call me off. He knew his danger, and looked at me with sad appeal, an earthly longing in his eyes. But to his wife he gave the eye of a sublimer hope. Upon me he rested his affairs of mortal life; to her he gave a nobler charge, the commission to plead his cause in eternity, and with faith she accepted it, in silence, for not a word did she speak of the dread at her heart. Nor by a look did she betray her fear; but out in the passageway, or out in the yard close against the corner of the house, she gave way to heavy grief.

"What makes your eyes so red, mother?" he asked.

She seemed surprised. "Are my eyes red? I didn't know it. Oh, I planted the pepper this morning. It must be that."

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"Bless your soul, mother, don't try to fool me. I know."

"Why, know what?"

"That I'm done."

"Why, listen, doctor, at his nonsense. I do believe that kettle's boiling over." She hastened from the room.

His fitful sleep was troubled with visions. Once he cried out: "Who but the devil would make a man walk with bare feet on the backs of toads and lizards?"

In the sitting-room neighbors gathered and sat in silence. Miss Silvester dismissed her school. Old Bethpage hung about the place, walking up and down the lawn or standing meditatively with one foot on a stump, leaning over with chin propped. Once he tiptoed into the room where the sick man lay.

"Your old ears will catch the spat of the first persimmon that hits the ground," said Luke, looking at him with a wide but blank eye.

"Is he in his right mind, doctor?" Bethpage asked.

"He's wandering."

"Yes," said Luke, "and as long as I live she shall have the fattest gobbler on this place every year. Choked him! Yes! but I'm sorry, and I begged his pardon. Afraid of you! I've been afraid of you all my life. But I'm not afraid now that I see you. You are a deceitful old liar. You can't burn a soul. Get out of my way. You are nothing but a black shadow."

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One morning we felt that the end was near. Lady and Miss Polly were with us. We sat in the sitting-room. The fireplace was full of plum boughs in withered bloom. Luke was alone with his wife. We heard her praying.

"Doctor, can't you do something?" Miss Polly asked, her little eyes looking large with tears. "It do seem strange that nothin' more can be done."

"Nothing can serve him now," I answered. "His course is run."

Lady sat gazing at me. On her face was the pale understanding of death. She did not know life, but death was no more of a mystery to her than to us.

Mrs. Radshaw appeared at the door. Her countenance was smooth with resignation. "You may all come in and tell him good-by," she said in a voice that did not tremble.

I took Lady by the hand and led her into the room. She sank upon her knees at the bedside. The old man looked up out of his stupor and put his hand upon her head. Bethpage whispered that a man outside had come in great haste to see me. I went out, and a man ran to me and urged me to come at once to his son, crushed by a falling tree. I turned back to get my hat. Lady stood in the passage.

"Is Luke going to die?" she asked.

"Yes, my poor little girl."

"Will he go to heaven?"

"As sure as there is a God."

"Is he afraid of the devil now?"

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"No, he is beyond all fear."

"Does God love him?"

"As much as he ever loved man."

She kissed me.

Mrs. Radshaw came out. "You must go," she said. "You can't do anything more here."

"I'm going."

"You may not be back to-night, doctor, but we'll—we'll see you to-morrow. Good-night."

There was no moon. The world, like unto our stricken house, was dark. On the lawn I heard a moan. "Who is it?" I asked.

"Nobody but me," a voice answered. Mattie Boyce was kneeling beneath my poplar tree.

"Go to the house, little girl."

"No, *she's* there."

"Go anyway. He has talked about you in his wanderings."

"I will go," she said.

My heart was heavy, but I was saved the pang of seeing him die. On Chestnut Hill I looked back at the low light in our house. It seemed to sink lower as I looked—a life fading.

During all the night I strove to repair the ruin of a boy, and at morning I rode toward home, carrying with me my deep sorrow and the gratitude of a father and mother. I had told them that their son might live. From the hill-top I could see no one at home. The old place seemed to be deserted. Its spirit had departed with the soul of the master. I dreaded to see the first sign of life, to meet anyone. Old Bethpage passed through the gate and rode

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toward his home. I was thankful that he did not see me. In a corner of a field a flock of sheep were clustered. One old mother rang her bell, and they all looked at me with deep melancholy in their eyes. I saw Lady slowly walking down toward the big gate. Her heavy heart weighted her gaze to the ground. She did not lift her eyes to search the road for me; but I knew that she had come down to post herself at the gate, charged to tell me of our loss. I reached the gate before she looked up, dismounted without noise, opened the gate, and led the horse through. The horse snorted. She looked up, and with a cry came running to me and sprang to my sorrowful arms. But what meant the glad light in her eyes?

"Oh, Mitford, he's better—he's going to get well."

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CHAPTER XXV.

NO LONGER FEARED HIM.

How quick the heart is to give all nature a tint of its own hue. The leaves from sorrowful sighings were turned to the whisperings of perfumed secrets, and the old mother sheep's bell was full of a gladsome tinkle. On the broad land there lay cool and inviting spots, but there was nowhere a shadow of sadness. With masterful will, the rugged old man threw off the effects of disease. The humorous light, softened by an under-mellow glow, shone in his eyes as he walked about the house humming a tune. None of us could get enough of him, and we followed him to catch his words and nibble at them. One day in my office he said to me:

"Mitford, I know I'm saved. Oh, I know it, and nothing could change my view. My struggles and my fear were all wrong, and I've come to this conclusion: Christ died to save every woman anyhow, and every man who does the best he can. Yes, sir, that's my creed. Why, sir, this thing of a literal hell is like the fox-fire we find on rotten wood—it looks hot till you touch it. During the early part of my sickness I thought old Satan had me; but I'd braved him and feared him so many times that I was determined to grin and bear it. And just about the time I thought he had me I

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touched his fox-fire. I laughed, and he faded to nothing but a shadow. And I said to myself: 'So this is the stuff that has been scaring women and children and weak-minded men.' Yes, and I came away with more love for the Savior and with no fear of the devil. I believe I'll walk down the road as far as Mattie's house. Oh, it won't hurt me; I'm getting as strong as a buck."

Shortly after he left Glich came in and sat down to scrape, with a piece of glass, the enormous horn of a steer.

"I don't reckon you mind the litter, doctor. I picked up this horn the other day, and I said to myself, 'Now, here is a beauty.' A man that would blow a tin horn in a fox-hunt ought to be run out of the county. It's an insult to a hound and a disgrace to a fox. You can begin to see through it down here," he said, holding up the horn between me and the light. "Music! Why, a fiddle is a pitiful whine compared with it. Look here, do you know that old Bethpage went over to the school-house and interrupted the proceedings yesterday? Yes, he did, and he insisted on walking home with her."

"She still keeps you gambling, I see."

"Yes, and I don't mind telling you that I'm getting sort of tired of it. It's all right to play, but it makes the game a good deal more interesting at times if a fellow feels that he's going to win out. Sometimes I think she'd like to have old Tuck's money. She's as ambitious as a colt. But I'll get money for her if she'll only give me time. She

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ought to know that. But she don't want to wait, it seems to me. Old Beth is getting feeble, and that makes me think she's more likely to take a shine to him. When a woman sets her head to marry an old chap for his money, the feebler he is the better for her. And if the old fool was to come down some day, shaking, and tell her that he had just let one foot slip off into the grave, I'll be hanged if I don't believe she'd marry the other one. If she ain't coming right now, I'm the biggest liar that ever whooped at a fox."

Miss Silvester asked if she might come in and put an end to what she knew must be an entertaining conversation. Mrs. Radshaw had gone over to see Miss Polly, the house was deserted, and she was lonesome. I broke in upon her excuse for coming, and Glich, lunging out of his chair, took her hand and led her in. She laughed at his gallantry. She was surprised that he had not overturned the table. What scene of clod-hopping antics had he canvassed to learn his awkwardness? She wondered if aught but a walk in his sleep, forgetful of himself and his ungarnered strength, would ever lend him grace of movement.

"But you are too big to be graceful," she added.

"But Bethpage ain't too little to be disgraceful," and with a laugh he roared: "Oh, I got you that time."

"I don't see how," she replied. "Bethpage is nothing to me."

"He's nothing to anybody, not even to himself. Got you again."

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"You are the silliest man I ever saw. You are as hollow as that horn, and as full of vain sound as it will ever be. But you are easier to blow—a mere breath sets you roaring."

"If you come at me with a list of figures, why I'm done. But, say, our six months will soon be up."

"I have two months more of freedom," she replied.

"That so? To me it seems like it's been more than a year."

"But you are not to lose your liberty."

"Neither are you, my dear."

"'My dear' is the first link in the chain of bondage."

"She's piling figures on me, doctor. That's always her game. She knows I can't keep track of her."

"What if I should weigh you down with figures and run away—to Bethpage?"

"I'd choke the Adam's apple out of his throat."

"And leave me a widow?"

"Oh, no. I'd choke the beauty out of your neck."

"Murderous flatterer, I'll not run away."

"If you do, I'll blow this horn and track you with the hounds."

She turned to me. "Who could but admire this dark-age master? With what pleasure do I look forward to the summer evening scrap and the night brawl of winter. While neighboring women, with their red elbows exposed over the wash-tub, complain of the dull lives they lead, I can point to a

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tooth knocked out and tell them that for me this life is a round of constant action."

"Now, what do you want to talk that way for?" Glich complained. "I never hit a woman. And do you reckon a man's going to hit a woman he loves? But when you're in the humor, if you can't worry a man, I'll be blamed if I know who can. You won't let me make love to you."

"Glich, you don't know how."

"Then why don't you give me a lesson? You've taught all your gawks at school to write rhymes. I find them in the woods stuck on the trees. Why don't you let me love you?"

"I thought you did. Don't you?"

"I mean why don't you let me—confound it—make love to you? I wouldn't break you if I put my arms around you."

"What! you talk that way in the presence of the doctor."

"Oh, what's the use of such tomfoolery? Don't he know we're engaged? I'm getting tired of being treated this way, I'll tell you that right now."

"If you want to drive me to Bethpage, why don't you get a whip?"

"Don't need a whip. He can lead you with a pea-vine."

"Doctor, that isn't so bad," she said to me; "I'll have him in my school writing rhymes."

"Rough and tumble blank verse would suit him better," I replied.

"No matter what would suit me best, I wouldn't send a rope to an old wretch and tell him to hang

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himself. I wouldn't do that, and have every fool in the neighborhood tittering my name."

Her eyes snapped. "If you heard a fool tittering my name why didn't you choke the Adam's apple out of his throat?"

"Do you reckon a fool is fool enough to let me catch him at it? But I want to tell you it's a serious thing to have people say you sent a man a rope with your compliments. Why did you?"

"Because I wanted him to hang himself. I heard he had been looking for a rope, and I thought I'd save him further trouble, presuming that his eyesight was bad. But I won't be lectured, sir."

"There now, I beg your pardon. I didn't mean it, blamed if I did. I can prove it by the doctor I didn't. He knows me—hanged if she ain't laughing at me. Well, it's all right. You even keep me gambling on your humor. You are sharp enough to be of use to me in a trade. I've been buying heifers lately, and you ought to be able to look into a heifer's eye and price her."

"I can look into a bull's eye and tell which way to jump when he would toss me on his mud-tipped horns."

"There, you're at your figures again. When we're married we'll keep house in the clouds."

"And," with a smile she said, "we'll curtain our windows with sun-tinted mists, with purple vapors hang the couch, and pillow it with a white puff of fog."

"You're too much for me, my lady," he said, throwing his bit of glass into the fireplace and

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looking thoughtfully at his horn. "Yep; you keep me straining with a long reach, but I can't get hold of you. I'm no fool, and I've met a few women—went to school to some of 'em, but you lay 'em all out. Well," he added, getting up and brushing the horn scrapings off his trousers, "I'm going down beyond Bethpage's to haggle with a fellow over a heifer. Must I stop and tell the old mink you sent your love to him?"

"Yes, if you please."

"I'd see him hung up by the heels first."

He strode out with the horn under his arm. She looked after him with a smile. The horn slipped and fell to the ground. He stooped to pick it up, and she laughed at his awkwardness, and in her laughter I fancied that there was a sneer at herself. I wondered if it would not have been easier for her to excuse villainy than clumsiness. She could have borne scandal easier than ridicule. The sneer in her laughter shot at me a hope that I might yet make good my idle promise to Mattie Boyce.

"You don't think he's graceful, do you?" said I.

"I have never pretended that I thought so."

"It was his violence that won you."

"It was his persistence that wrested my consent from me."

"Only a consent? But you went to bed in a tremor, and lying there you almost—"

"Will you please stop harping on that?"

"I beg your pardon, but—"

"But what?"

"Well, you acknowledged more than a consent."

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"Really! And what if I did? Is it so much to you?"

"I confess to a meddlesome interest."

"A meddlesome interest! I don't know whether your acknowledgment is gracious or brazen."

"It's frank, to say the least."

"Frank! I hate that word, that poison given as medicine."

"The most specific remedies are poisonous."

"How stale that is. Can't you think of something else? You are Glich's friend. You believe he loves me, but you don't want him to marry me. Be honest, now."

"Be frank?"

"Yes, poisonous."

"I've never said that his marrying you would please me."

"Please you! Of course, that should be my only consideration. But let me tell you once for all that I'm going to marry him. If you ask me why, I must say I don't know. Then if you call me a fool, I'll agree with you. But we won't spat, doctor. I like you; you interfere with things that don't concern you, and don't try to shield yourself. Your sympathy is stronger than your judgment, and to me that is a great recommendation. I hate judgment. It sets itself up in cool superiority. Mrs. Radshaw has come back. I hear her calling the chickens."

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CHAPTER XXVI.

BEGGED FOR ONE MONTH MORE.

Hot weather came, with one day almost as another on the old farm, with a welcome to the shower and a greeting to the sun. Never now in passing the house did I hear a midnight prayer. The distressful part of faith was gone, and in its place sweetly reigned the sound slumber of perfect trust. Luke was hale and full of fun. For a time I was afraid that a change of season, a worry, might bring back his old brooding; but when weeks and months had passed, when at night I had listened for a groan and had heard a tune, I believed with him that his day of careless grace had come. I went to hear him address the children of a Sunday-school, and he made them laugh with stories. He declared to me that his crop was better, that his sheep were healthier, that his work was easier since he had shaken the devil off his shoulders. One morning, upon looking up from the breakfast table, I saw this inscription over the door: "Fear Satan and you ridicule the love of the Lord." His wife shook her head at the text. She believed that a well-governed fear of our most monstrous tradition was a brace to moral life. And I fancied that she sighed over Luke's complete emancipation. She seemed now to feel that a part of her office was gone, that she was not now of so much use to him.

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Miss Silvester's vacation came on, and the time for her marriage drew near. One morning I heard her pleading for one month's extension. Glich stormed at her. He was going far across the ridge after a drove of heifers and wanted to take her with him. It would be a bridal tour always to be remembered and to be talked about by the envious. They would camp out and sleep in the woods like gypsies. He didn't see how she could throw over such a trip. She would get up at morning with bright leaves hanging in her hair. It would be a picture. She acknowledged the strength of the inducement. She would like to be a gypsy and live in the woods, but she must have one more month of freedom. She wasn't quite ready. It took time, and she had been busy with her school. No, it was not with the intention of seeking to see more of Bethpage. She had seen enough of him and had dismissed him. Really, just one more month was all she wanted. She wouldn't ask for another delay. She would then come forward, not with a hang-back look, but with the timid gladness of a willing bride. Just one month.

"Of course, one month don't amount to so much," said Glich. "What I don't like is to see you break your promise."

"Break my promise! I'll not break it. What is more elastic than a promise to wed? I'll not break it—I'll pull it just a little. It will stretch, but won't break."

"Figures," he said, "figures. You are beginning to pile 'em up again. Now here, if I agree to wait

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one more month, will you swear to be ready at the end of that time?"

"Yes, I will."

"Well, hold up your right hand and I'll swear you."

She held up her right hand and he administered an oath. When he turned away I said to her: "You must feel that this time you are going to keep it. You have sworn."

"I am," she replied; "I wouldn't swear to a deception. I ought to have great respect for an oath," she added, smiling. "My father was the profanest man in the county, and I don't know but I've heard my mother swear at her wash-tub."

"You have a list of very happy recollections."

"Charming. But now, don't you be worried. I'll keep my oath."

"Oh, it wouldn't worry me if you should break it."

"Indeed! And you would have a lady break her solemn oath—a lady whose father cursed his horses and whose mother swore at a tub? Really, doctor, I'm surprised at you."

"Yes? But you can't say anything to surprise me. For a time you were a constant surprise; but now I expect surprises, and am, therefore, not astonished."

"Very good, sir. Sometimes I like the twist you give a meaning. But I might give you a surprise, and you may not be able to twist the astonishment out of it. I might become a most docile and loving wife. Would that astonish you?"

"It would almost frighten me."

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"Then I will scare you nearly to death. One of these days someone will ask, 'Who was that meek-looking woman I saw at church?' 'Oh, you mean Mrs. Glich Radshaw,' someone will reply. 'Hasn't she an air of sweet patience? And how she looks up to her husband. They say that she's an excellent judge of a heifer.' You don't believe it could be, do you? But it shall. I'm going to be the most patient woman you ever saw. At morning I'll roll up my sleeves, and I'll sing a lonesome song when the sun goes down. A lonesome song is the spirit of patience."

"I thought you were more ambitious."

"I was, but my ambition is dead. Glich struck it on the head with a bludgeon and it died, slowly winking its eyes. No, sir, I'm not ambitious. I am going to be the lowly wife of the buyer and seller of cattle."

And it seemed to me that from the moment of this speech she grew meeker. The wayward and rebellious light faded from her eye, and her look was soft, as if in musing she had argued herself into resignation. She forsook her books. At morning I had often seen her at an upper window, thrusting forth her book into the first light of day, but now in her plainest garb she would come down to the dining-room and do a servant's work. Once I found her milking a cow. She got up and stood with one hand resting on her hip. She spoke in a tone subdued; in it there was no challenge to a clash of words. I told her that I had brought her magazine from the postoffice, and with a new light

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of surprise she made her face look strange to me. She did not care for the magazine. I might keep it. I strove to betray her into sarcasms, into calling Glich her violent master, but with a smile, she said, "Dear Glich," and sat down to her work.

The heifer-trader marveled. "The game's about closed," he said to me one night in the office. "I don't think I'll ever have to gamble for her again, and I'm glad of it, for I'm tired. After all, she's pretty much like the most of women, so far as I understand them. Crush 'em ninety-nine times, and they rise up, keen to fight you again, but when you've staked your money on the hundredth time, they don't rise up to fight, but give you a smile, and say, 'Please help me up.' That oath settled her. Since then she hasn't disputed with me a single time. And I oughtn't to say it, but sometimes she's tiresome. The other night I asked her if she thought she'd always love me, and she seemed hurt. She'll make me a good wife. But I can't keep from thinking it was spirit that won me. What are you doing with that rifle there in the corner?"

"Lady and I are going squirrel-hunting, to-morrow. We've gone several times."

"And you use her to go round the tree to turn the squirrels. She can do that as well as anybody. Coming down to the truth, I reckon she's as handsome as they make 'em. She thinks the world of the old man, but she never had any too much use for me. Now I'm going to tell you something: I loved her once—yes, sir, I said to myself, 'Mind or no mind, I love you,' and I tried to make her under-

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stand. Huh, she spit fire at me. She called me a wild hog. And I couldn't crush her. Do you know what I did? I humbled myself worse than dad did before that banker's wife. I had rumpled her hair —my way of telling her that I loved her—and blamed if I didn't almost crawl on the ground to beg her pardon. I believe she would have killed me. One day, more than a year afterward, she came over here with a running briar wound around her head, and declared that I had rumpled her hair the day before. I tell you, if she had her mind, they'd all have to take a back seat. I look on her with the respect I'd show a spirit, I tell you. I reckon, doctor, I'm a good deal of a wretch after all. I've done some kind things, but as a rule kind things are too slow for me. I want something that keeps me jolting like riding in a wagon over a rough road. But as I grow older I begin to look forward to something quiet — a home and a wife that won't ruffle me. But here I am, as usual, talking a streak about myself, and you haven't said a word. Well, I must go up to the house, now, and talk 'yeses, and 'oh certainlies' and 'ah, has' to my love. She used to be a freshet, but now she's more like a pool."

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CHAPTER XXVII.

WOULD LIVE A TRUTH.

Far up the glen where trickling water cooled the moss, Lady and I sat down to rest. With ferns in her lap, her eyes full of never-tiring wonder at an accustomed scene, she would talk and not think upon her words till she had spoken them, and then not to call them back, though they might sound bold. Many a squirrel had we seen, but not once had the gun been fired. It would have been like shooting at a playful fancy, a sportive sentiment of the woods. On the point of a low gravel stretch that lay in the creek, a kingfisher nodded in the sun. A glistening water snake lay on the yellowish lap of a willow bush. A watchful hawk sat on the dead top of a sycamore tree. The hawk spied us and flew with a cry, the kingfisher shot up the creek and the snake slid off into the water. It was a day when we rest before we are weary, a time when words end in easing sighs, when old tunes hum in the lazy water, when there arises sudden, half-formed convictions that we viewed the scene ages ago; and then every sound brings up a recollection of that dateless past, till at last we shake off the shackles of the strange enthrallment.

"I would rather not live than not to love you, Mitford."

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It was in the love she gave that she found her happiness. She could not form a doubt of me. She lived in the joyous glow of her own affections.

"I used to wish I was turned into a bird so I could fly away from the torch, but I don't now. I'd rather have the torch come and bring that awful darkness, if I could always find you sitting by me when the light comes back."

"I hope always to be with you, when the light goes and when it comes. I wish that my coming might always bring a light to you."

"It does, Mitford. You are my torch that comes in the day and makes everything brighter. Once I was thinking of being always with you, and I told Mammy that I was going to ask you to let me live with you in the office so I could have a fire for you when you'd come home of a cold winter night, but she jumped out of her chair and dropped her knitting, and said I must never talk that way again. Why did she say that, Mitford? Because you are no kin to me? Would it be wrong for me to live there when I love you so? Why would it be wrong?"

I took her hands from among the ferns in her lap. I kissed her and I strove to make her understand, but she shook her head.

"But, Mitford, why must we live apart when I love you so? Whenever I hear the dogs bark at night, I jump out of bed and light a candle and put it at the window, and I say to myself 'Maybe Mitford has come to take me home with him.' Will you ever come for me? If you come at night when

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the wind is blowing hard we won't take a lantern for it might go out and then we couldn't see as well as we could before—we'd slip away without waking Mammy, and the next day we'd come back and invite her over to see us. We'd cook on the fireplace and pretend like we haven't anything fit to eat, and laugh at her. Do you think you will ever come for me?"

"I hope—yes, one of these days, and with me will come Luke, Mrs. Radshaw, the teacher and the neighbors. They will come to see me take you away. We will be married."

"Married. Oh, yes, and then we may be together all the time. Married."

She repeated the word over and over. How strange it was that some things lay within such easy grasp, death and some of the complicated phases of life, and how incomprehensible were simpler affairs. But her mind had its flow and there seemed to be no way to change its course.

I took her home, and then, with a fresh sorrow on my mind, roamed through the woods. I was engaged to her, and though my heart leaped with love, my judgment turned cold. But aloud I said: "Let the judgment administer upon cool affairs and let the heart keep warm in its own joy." I would marry her.

It was dark when I reached my office. Feeling about for a match I found a letter upon the table. I lighted a lamp and looked at the superscription. The writing was unknown to me, but so was the

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handwriting of everyone in the neighborhood. Breaking the seal I turned to the end of the last page and read the name, "Clara Silvester." Then I sat down to read:

My Dear Doctor:—It is better to swear a lie than to live a lie. With the doggedness of a clod I was determined to marry Glich, but I cannot. I cowed my own spirit, I tied it to a cow's tail and let her lash the flies with it, and I thought that finally it had been trampled down in the barn-yard, and it might have been, but it arose and came back to me. More than a week ago I received a letter from the president of a large female school (I hate that word female), in the capital of the state, offering me a position, and I am going now to answer it in person. I will walk over to the old tavern and then hire a conveyance to take me to the railway. I shall speak no good-bys—I might shed a tear over the old man's hand. I write to you because I have the time, I suppose. And because I like you. You have helped to keep me alive, with your false notions of kindness and your airs of superiority. Once I thought I'd try to win you and ruffle your self-importance, but I decided not to. I couldn't. Do you think I could? Yes, I like you, and one of these days I am going to write you from my academic grove. I sigh when I think of the ravings of my violent master. I have left a note for him, to be read this evening when he returns with a new gathering of heifers, and I should not be surprised to see him gallop up like a highwayman and stop my vehicle. Quiet him as best you can. Tell him that you know where there's a red heifer cheap for cash, and this may appease him. I have paid old Bethpage every cent with interest, so after all he can't complain of his speculation. I am writing nonsense to keep my eyes dry. I go hence to liberty, but sadness not bigger than a

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mouse is gnawing at my heart. I was born here, like a hayrick rat, and I love the hills and the creek. They are as much mine as if my father had not lived in a stable.

Out in the yard I see old Luke walking, and I will give you my time till he goes away. I have sent my lean baggage by a boy, stole it out as if I owed for my board. And now all I have to do is to leave this letter for you and be gone. If I could live here for another year, to study and to juggle meanings with you, I should like it, but within shouting distance of Glich I could not remain in peace. Once he threatened to burn my books, a pitiable armful, as if they held my affections from him. I am astonished at what I have endured. With me it was a speculation as to how far he would carry his tyranny. And yet I like him. He can be generous to one whom he does not love.

The old man is standing beneath your poplar tree. To-day he put his hand on my head and said he was happy. I said, "You may kiss me, if you please," and he did. He called me his daughter. How long he waited for a black spot to be sponged from his mind.

When you have heard from me I want you to tell me of Lady and yourself. You know what I mean. Her handsome face won you before you knew she had a beautiful soul. How man-like. What do you care for brains?

Just before Glich rode off to-day he issued a command that I must go to old Balsch and ask the villain's pardon and take the rope away. I bowed meekly and lisped, "Yes, sir." I clung to my sworn lie to the very last moment. And here I am trying to persuade you to think kindly of me. I hope you will. But you may do as you like. I see that I must summon a thinner quality of nonsense to keep my eyes dry. The old hill over there—it

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seems a friend and I hate to leave it. When you and Lady sit there in the shade, call it Silvester's hill, just once, please. The old man is gone and I must go. Good by.

With eyes not dry I read the letter again. I felt an impulse to rush forth and shout to her to come back. Through my mind flew a thousand pleasant words that I might have spoken to her. But she would never let me speak kindly. She always came with a thorn to jibe me. The sound of a heavy tread reached me and I stepped to the open door for I knew that Glich was coming. He entered without saying a word and threw his hat upon the table, making the lamp-flame dodge.

"Well," he said, sitting down, "I see you have a letter from her, too. But I don't want to hear a word of it. Mine's enough. Listen."

"Don't read it, please," said I.

"All right. Don't love me. I never thought she did—very hard. But she swore she'd marry me—swore to a lie. What do you think of that?"

"Let that pass. I think more of her, Glich, than I ever did. She has gone to live a truth."

"All right, let her live it and be—I won't say it."

"No, you mustn't say anything disrespectful of her. Now she belongs as much to me as she does to you, and you must not—"

"Well, but have I, confound it? Don't be uppish. Yes, let her live her truth. And I want to tell you that I read her letter without a gulp. I can confess to something more shameful than that. I'm glad she's gone. It's better for her and

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for me. After she got tame I found that I didn't love her. Before I go further let me acknowledge that in most things I'm a fool. I'm all right when it comes to buying cattle, but my judgment on the woman question ain't strong. I've been wobbling like a crooked wheel for some time, and I don't know that I would have married her if she hadn't run away. I've been lying awake at night doing some thinking, and I've come to the conclusion that there's such a thing as a man and a woman being born for each other. That brought me back to Mattie Boyce. The old folks love her and so do I. Yes, sir, and I never really loved anybody else. And now will you do me a favor? Will you go down to her house and ask her to come up here with you?"

"Yes, willingly, but it won't be fair to her. She would come, I know; but you ought to go down there."

"Oh, I'd be glad enough to go, but I don't want to meet the old woman. I ask it as a favor. Will you go?"

I stood beneath a green gourd-vine and knocked at the door. Mattie lifted the latch and bade me enter. She was pale and she looked tired. "Sit down," she said, putting the hair back out of her eyes. "You must excuse the way everything looks. We washed to-day and let the house go. Mother's gone over to see old Miss Polly."

"I'm glad you didn't go," said I. "There's someone waiting for you in my office."

"Someone waiting for me?"

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"Yes, a man. Can't you guess?"

"No," she replied, shaking her head. "I don't believe I can."

"Don't you remember my promise—that I would bring him back?"

Her face turned paler. "And is he there waiting for me? Where is *she?*"

"Gone, not to come back again."

"Gone. And now he's waiting for me."

"Yes, but he wouldn't have married her if she hadn't gone. He says he never loved anyone but you. He's waiting."

"Oh, is he? Well, let him wait as I have waited. And he thinks I'll come whining to him. I won't. He must come to me. Tell him so—but tell him not to come with a high head. He must humble himself as I have done."

I turned away, and glad that I could tell him of the rebuke, hastened to the office. Glich was standing in the door. "Wasn't she at home?" he asked.

"Yes, but she won't come."

"The devil she won't? Well, we'll see about that. What's holding her?"

"A just pride is holding her, and I am glad that she has so much spirit. You have treated her shamefully—I am ashamed of myself for asking her to come. To tell you the truth, she ought to spit in your face."

"Come, now, don't talk to me that way. I won't have it. I don't understand you, flying off that way. I'm sorry and that's all I can say."

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"Yes, I do fly off. I haven't any more sense than you have—we are all weak alike. But she says you must come to her, and you should, as I told you in the first place. And you must not only go to her; you must humble yourself. The old woman isn't there."

"Seems as if she wants to pile it on me. But I deserve it. I haven't treated her right. I'll go."

The door stood open. The girl received us with a dignified courtesy. Glich trod heavily upon the floor. "Mattie," said he, "I've been a wretch and a fool. I ought to be hanged, and if you'll get a rope I'll tie one end of it around my neck. I never was sensible but once, and that was when I asked you to marry me; and I've come to be sensible again."

She stepped back. "I'm glad to know you're sensible. And you've come back to tell me you've taken your muddy foot off my heart. You might have spared yourself that trouble. I've taken it off."

"Why, Mattie, I didn't expect this from you."

"I can well believe that. And what do you think I've been doing while you've been going through your changes?"

"But for the Lord's sake, don't say that you have changed toward me. Why, there never was a time if it had come to a showdown when I could have married anybody but you. As I told the doctor, you are the only woman I ever loved. I have been a fool and I beg you to overlook it. I'll get down on my knees and ask you to forgive me. You know how I must love you to do that. I'd forgive the

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worst scoundrel on the face of the earth if he'd beg this way. My heart has always been true but my brain didn't have sense enough to know it. My heart ain't bad, Mattie—and you know that I'd lay down my life for you. You know I won't lie. You know I can pardon wrongs. I backed out of a fight once because you touched me with your finger; and I walked off with you and let them call me a coward, all because the fellow was kin to you. I deserve it, but don't tramp on me now."

She turned away with her face in her hands. She sat down, sobbing, and he ran to her and took her in his arms. And so I left them, stealing away, to walk under the stars, and to hear a mocking-bird, high in the moonlight, singing to its mate.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

WITH MY COAT WRAPPED ABOUT HER.

Early the next morning I saw the old man, with folded arms and thoughtful countenance, standing beneath the poplar tree. He held out his hand as I came up, and there was the vigor of gladness in his grip.

"It's all right, my son; it's all right. Last night he showed us the note the teacher left for him, and later he came with the news that he had made it up with Mattie. I tell you everything has been going better since I shook off the devil and kicked his pack of fox-fire. Yes, sir. And I've taken up the mortgage on the farm. I'm prepared to live or die, and I don't believe the Lord could send a greater blessing than this sort of a condition. I'm sorry to lose the teacher, but she'll be happier where she's going, and even her loss although a regret ought to be a pleasure. No, sir, I don't know that at present I can suggest an improvement in the regulation of our affairs, and if we only had a rain—but there I go, looking for a flaw. We do need rain, however, and there's no getting round that fact. But we are happy, and that means everything. Do you know of any calls you've got to make to-day? Let's loll around and enjoy ourselves."

"I have a patient over in the brush-woods."

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"Away over there? I don't envy you that trip. They haven't had a drop of rain for nearly three months, and the roads are horse-hoof deep in dust."

"I'm not going to ride—going to walk through the woods, and Lady is going with me."

"All right, then you've gone half the distance already. She can shorten a path."

"Yes, there's no long road when I'm with her. I'm going to persuade her to let me take her to a specialist."

"I hope you may, but you'll have to be mighty shrewd about it. But don't you think you can cure her? Everywhere I go I hear of your skill."

"No, she is beyond me. She requires a specialist. You speak of my skill. I haven't much—I'm lucky and prosperous. It is supposed that I have money, and the magic of money follows even the medical profession. The ignorant will trust dollars to set a broken leg."

"That's all true enough, doctor, but you've got the ability. Why, I know a good doctor when I see him—I can tell him a mile off."

"I rather suspect that your friendship would make a good doctor of any man."

"Now, don't you fool yourself there, young fellow. Many a man has tried to impose on me, but always failed. Why, there came a fellow into this neighborhood once and hung out his shingle, and everybody said he was surely a fine doctor. But what did I say? I said 'no,' that's what I said; I said no the moment I set eyes on him. I liked him as a man; good fellow, but I saw that he was no

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doctor. So don't you fool yourself about me, young fellow. You trust a good deal to nature, and right in that point lies the finest sort of skill. Oh, a man can read all the books in the world and then not know anything except second hand. He's got to be there himself. All the books ever printed couldn't have freed me. I had to go and find out for myself."

I left him, and looking back saw him standing with his arms on the fence, looking at his sheep in the pasture.

Old Miss Polly had heard the news. She stood at the gate, looking up and down the lonesome road and when I stepped into the range of her recognition, she began to shout at me.

"Oh, you've had fine carryin's on over at your place, now, haven't you? And you tried to keep it from Old Polly, but you didn't. Law me, the tricks they resort to every day to keep me from hearin' things. So the teacher's gone. Knowd she'd never marry him—knowd it the minute I seen her. And that poor little gal awaitin' there all this long time. She ought to have boxed Glich's good-for-nothin' jaws and sent him about his business, the turn-coat. Love him, indeed. Why, if I was in her place rather than marry him I'd put a blister on myself, if no other way, and draw all the love out. Love him indeed. But I'm glad she made him humble himself, and if I don't help her hen-peck him I wish I may never see another sun-up. Lady's been cryin' because the teacher's gone, but I'm glad she had spunk enough to go. Yes. She was too uppish, I

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say, and this was no place for her. Let her go to town and put on fine duds if she can get 'em, and switch herself. The very first time I seen her I said to myself, 'Don't you switch at me. I won't have it.' And she didn't switch at me, I tell you. I took her in time."

Miss Polly continued to talk, but suddenly her voice sounded afar off and I lost the significance of her words. Among the shrubs in the garden I saw Lady gracefully wending her way through the tangle. I shouted. She looked up, and with a laugh she swept through the thicket and came running to the gate.

"Oh, is it to-day I am to go with you, Mitford? I was thinking of it out there, but somehow I didn't know when it was to be, and when you called I forgot everything else and for one little minute thought you'd come to take me home with you."

Miss Polly turned upon her with a frown to make harsh a tenderness lest it might be too tender with tears. "Didn't I tell you not to talk such nonsense?"

"Yes, mammy, but I forgot."

"Miss Polly, it is not nonsense," said I. "Don't chide a heart that can't keep itself in school. Before long I am going to take her home with me."

"Mitford, Mitford!" the old woman cried, "don't talk that way to me. There are some things a woman oughtn't to guess at—she must know, and if you've told her—why—" She broke down. "But how was I to know? How could I know when I considered everything? In my heart I thank the Lord—but why do you blame a hen for lifting her wings

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for the chickens to run under when she thinks she see a cloud coming? No, and I never thought a son of Dr. Hudley's would scold me; no, I never did, and at my own gate, too, and me all worried with everything on the place. Scolded by a Hudley."

Lady looked at me with a new worry in her eyes. She touched my hand with a distressful appeal. And the moment of silence that fell must have seemed a long time to her.

"Why, bless you, Miss Polly, I'm not scolding. It was my way of telling you to have no fear. I have considered everything and nothing weighs against my love for this woman."

"No, he didn't scold you," Lady cried, delighted.

"Well, laws a massy, who said he did?" the old woman exclaimed, her chin shaking. "Why, it's a putty come off when a body can't say a word. Scoldin', indeed. And if them fetch-taked hens don't stop scratchin' up the turnip seed I'll cut their toes off. But if you're goin' with the doctor run and get your sunbonnet. I always tell her to run and do a thing, just like she wan't taller than I am," she added, as Lady turned away, quick to obey the command. "Yes, jest like she was a child. Lord bless you, Mitford. It would break her heart—but I'm not goin' to cry, sir. You must think I'm a putty lookin' thing to stand here and cry every time a man comes along. Cry, indeed. I'll do nothin' of the sort, sir. I'll cut their toes off as sure as I live, if they don't stop. Now go on, both of you."

A warm wind was blowing. In low places where weeds had grown rank, sighing cows stood in the

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shade. The brooks were dry, and on the slaty pavement of their channels yellow leaves were drifting. We saw a hot and panting fox in search of water, on his way from the hills to the creek. In the boundless mystery of the upper air, a motionless buzzard looked like a black scar in the blue sky.

Over the parching hills and across the dusty roads where dry wagons creaked and tired horses stopped to blow, we took our way. About her waist Lady had wound a vine with red leaves, an Indian princess, spirit of the prehistoric woods.

"When you get tired we'll sit down and rest," said I.

"Oh, I won't get tired," she replied, looking at me with merry eyes. "I feel more like running than sitting down. Mitford, why did Miss Silvester go away? Was it because she didn't think they loved her? I did. No, I won't call it love—I'll call it like. I used to think I loved so many people, but now I know I only liked them. Did she think that nobody liked her?"

"No, she went away because she did not want to marry Glich."

"Oh, and when a woman don't want to marry a man she goes away."

"Not every time. It might be better if she did."

"Yes, if they don't love each other. I was talking to the preacher that came to our house, and he said that matches were made in heaven. I didn't know what he meant at first—I thought he meant matches we light, but after a while I understood him to mean that God tells people when to marry. I believe it,

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for God's love is in the heart and the heart tells. I have thought about it ever so much, and sometimes it comes out so clear, and then it gets dim again like everything else. Will it always be that way, Mitford?"

"I hope not," said I, taking her hand to help her across a gully. "If you would only do as I say."

"I will—I'll do anything you say. What do you want me to do?"

"Away off yonder there are men who doctor the mind, to keep things from growing dim. If you will go with me to one of them—"

She clutched my arm. "Oh, Mitford, how can we go away off there? How could I leave poor old mammy? She would sit up at night and grieve for me, and I would dream about her and cry in my sleep. But you never grow dim, Mitford; and as long as you don't, what difference do the other things make? I don't care for them—not even the things I read, when you are always clear. Don't take me away—let me stay here."

"We can take Mammy Polly with us," said I, moved by her appeal, determined to let her have her way.

"Oh, she wouldn't go. She'd be afraid the chickens would scratch up everything. I don't know how to tell you, but sometimes lately I almost remember something awful—but I won't try to think about it. I know I'm not right, but I love you and nothing else makes any difference."

"But you might love me better if—"

"How can you say that? You know better. Don't you? Say you do."

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She was now in front of me with her hands on my arms. I told her with a kiss.

"Oh, I knew you did. And you musn't think of taking me away. Why, those men would ask me all sorts of questions, like Dr. Hatch. And one time I began to ask him questions about things I'd read. He didn't know anything about them and Luke laughed at him and made him ashamed."

I saw my patient, and late in the afternoon we turned homeward, bearing to the right of the way we had come. The hot wind was stronger, and brought with it the scent of burning leaves. From a hill-top we saw a dense cloud of black smoke moving toward us. We veered still farther to the right, to find the smoke heavy and black. From the top of another hill we saw a sheet of flame sweeping through the woods, feeding upon the dry leaves of the underbrush. We turned about, but after going some distance found that the swift flames had circled round and were now behind us. The smoke grew so thick that we could hardly see, save here and there when the fire, with the impulse of the wind, leaped up to spring forward. The roar was frightful. Screaming birds flew over us. A gaunt rabbit ran past; a snake came sliding over the rocky ledge. We ran still farther to the right, hoping to reach a place where the woods had been dampened by the fitful showers that had passed over the country. We felt the heat. Through the smoke we could see the blazing tops of dead trees. A horse ran out of the fire and with a horrified cry ran back into it to plunge and to fall. We ran as fast as we could,

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The girl did not utter a word. I looked into her eyes as we were crossing a rough place, and the supreme trust I saw there smote me. On we went, panting, struggling to reach the top of a hill. I held her hand. I felt it tighten and I saw that the fire was in front of us—on all sides of us. We halted.

"Mitford."

"Yes," I gasped.

"Will we be burned up?'

"I am—am afraid so."

She smiled. "It will be together," she said.

I snatched off my coat, wrapped it about her skirts, lifted her in my arms and plunged toward a point where the fire appeared thinnest. A burning twig fell upon me. Flames leaped before my eyes. Into the channel of a dry rivulet I stumbled, and with my burden tight, struggled on. Her sleeve caught with a spark. I bit out the speck of fire—I could not move a hand. My hat was gone. My hair almost crackled. I could feel it curling with the heat. The crash of timber was frightful. We passed under an arch and a long arm of fire. The way was now steep and I went forward in lunges. Once I fell on my knees. And staggering to my feet, I looked through the smoke and far ahead I saw a solid wall of fire.

"It will be together," I said, pressing her to my heart.

A stone turned, a stumble, and down—down we went into the blessed waters of Caney Fork—down under the cool surface, a flowing heaven. We

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arose and stood waist deep in the current, a wall of flame on one shore, the blazing underbrush and falling trees on the other. She stood with her hands clasped over mine, looking up into my eyes.

"Mitford"—deep and strange was her voice—"Mitford, baptize me in the name of the Father and the Son."

A shiver ran over me. "Oh, precious one, it would be sacrilege."

"Mitford, God and my soul appoint you. Baptize me in the name of the Father and the Son."

And there in the creek, with the fire roaring about us, I baptized her in the name of the Father and the Son, and she arose with a cry of joy and with a holy light in her eyes. Down the creek she led me by the hand, singing as I had never heard mortal sing before. And far down we came to the green woods again, and then to the rock on which we had knelt to drink. Here she bade me leave her, to let her run home and tell the old woman that she had passed through fire into baptism. I let her go, and I turned toward home, my heart uplifted. I did not go to the house—I went to my office to be alone with the strange spirit that possessed me, and in the dark I knelt and gave my soul to God.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

Early at morning there came a shout at my door, the voice of Old Polly. "Run over to my house as fast as you can," she cried. "Lady's mind has come back." She ran away, shouting at Luke, whom she must have seen walking on the lawn, and I jumped into my clothes, my heart fluttering. When I rushed forth the rim of the sun was blazing on the top of "Silvester's Hill." Luke and Miss Polly shouted at me. "She's waitin' for you," the old woman cried. I did not stop to ask a question; I ran to the woods, down the path to the creek, and there I halted for a moment to kneel upon the rock—our rock—to drink, for my throat was still parched from the great heat of the fire. Then I hastened onward, taking the shortest way through the woods. Lady stood at the gate. She came walking fast to meet me. She held out her hand, her face aglow. I took her to my heart, longing to hear her speak, but she was silent, her heart beating hard against mine. She turned about, led me through the gate as she had led me down the creek, and pointed to a bench in the cool and dewy shade. We sat down, she holding my hands.

"In the night the torch came," she said, speaking slowly. "I thought I was at the gate, looking down

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the road for you—and I saw the torch come out of the darkness. I was about to run away, but just then I saw that you carried it. You held it out with a smile and I touched it—and I sprang up in bed and the whole world was full of light, with nothing dim, with my mind free. I can't tell you much now; everything is so new, and you must not expect much till I am out of the dazzle. I have jumped full grown from a dream into the real world. And now I remember everything—the murder of my poor mother—all. Just the least click in the mind means so much; it means to know or not to know, to dream or to live. In my sleep you came to me to sweeten my dream—I won't try to be modest; I am too thankful to consider what is proper. Oh, the fire and the baptism, my cure through the heart. I am perfectly sane, Mitford, but everything is so new. You must bear with me. How many foolish things I must have said to you; but I will not take back one word of love. Oh, this glorious day, the sun, the leaves. While waiting for you I have been watching the birds, and they, too, seem to have been aroused from a dream. Don't stop me, Mitford. Let me flow like a brook turned loose. I jumped out of bed and ran to mammy, and before I said a word she cried, 'Thank the Lord.' She knew. And I told her to run for you."

"And you didn't doubt me when the great light came?"

"Oh, no, you brought the light, Mitford."

"And it would have been the same with my love, Lady, if the light had never come. But I thank the

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Lord that it did come, and I must dream till I can realize it."

"You must call me by my real name, Barbara—no, you first knew me by my dream name. Let us not change it. I will soon get used to the light. This morning I plucked a rose, and for the first time I caught the full meaning of its soul—its perfume. To me, God has just finished creating the world. And yet I am surprised that I remember so much. I must have observed closely and read a great deal. Words that I never knew before have come throbbing into my mind. In the fire—but we won't talk about that. We must wait."

"Till we are both stronger," said I. "The miracle of our deliverance—but silence is my only balm. Not your silence—mine. Talk to me."

She talked and I listened, as much to the new accents of her voice as to the meaning of her words. I knew that her mind had sprung to perfect health, and yet her trustful affection was the same, so independent is the heart of the mind. Vividly she recalled the night of the murder, down to the time when she leaped from the bluff into the creek, and between then and the glimmering of the next thought there seemed to lie an age of freezing darkness. Often she would break off to follow with her eyes the flight of a bird, or the dodging course of a bee among the flowers; and sometimes she would look at the hills far away as if testing with enjoyment the range of her new vision. She recalled the plot of a love story, the marriage at the end, and marriage was no longer a dim shadow.

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"I remind myself of a baby," she said. "I want to touch everything. But the newness will soon wear off, Mitford, and then I'll be sensible."

"I wish it might never wear off," I replied. "You are teaching me to see Nature for the first time; you are charming my vision."

"Then let things stay new as long as they can," she said, and then after a moment of musing she added: "Let us go to Luke. I want to put my arms around his neck. But first let us go up the creek to the place where you baptized me."

We went up the creek to the edge of the fire-swept land, and there we halted for the air was full of ashes. But we crossed the stream and came within sight of the place where we had stumbled down the dry channel into the living stream. She gazed long and tenderly, her hands clasped in mine, and she looked into my eyes as she had looked when she told me to baptize her. We picked our way along a path, and came out into the road not far from Balsch's house. And then we walked rapidly.

"Why, yonder is Luke standing in front of Balsch's," said I.

"And someone is with him," she replied.

The old man did not see us till we drew near, and then he appeared to be excited. Lady ran to him and put her arms about his neck. "But you mustn't stop here a minute," said he, his voice hoarse. "No, you must go away as quick as you can."

"Why, what has happened?" I asked.

The man standing there grinned at me and I recognized Pryor, the horse-trader.

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